

## Reporting Concerns

### Environmental Concerns and Environmental Emergencies

The Missouri Department of Natural Resources's (DNR) Division of Environmental Quality is responsible for "preventing pollution, protecting the public from harmful emissions, discharges and waste disposal practices." Part of its mission is to respond to environmental concerns and environmental emergencies. See how DNR distinguishes these situations below:

"An **environmental concern** is a situation that you believe threatens the environment, such as a trash dump or discarded waste tires in a stream."

"An **environmental emergency** poses an immediate threat to the public health or the well-being of the environment."

Environmental emergencies that may result from CAFO activities include fish kills and "accidents causing releases of pollutants" like manure spills or lagoon leakage (see more examples from DNR [here](#)). If you are involved in or witness an environmental emergency, you should report it immediately to the Department of Natural Resources at 573-634-2436.

If your environmental concern doesn't match this definition of an emergency, you can still call it into the DNR through your [regional office](#) or the general office number 800-361-4827 on weekdays between 8:00 AM CST and 5:00 PM CST. Environmental concerns can also be reported online through the DNR's [Environmental Concern Form](#).

### Reporting Environmental Concerns to the Department of Natural Resources

#### 1. Reporting Online

When you reach DNR's Environmental Concern Form webpage, you should select 'Report an Environmental Concern' from the dropdown menu under 'Type of Inquiry' (note there are also options to submit general inquiries and comments through this form). Once you select 'Report an Environmental Concern', you will see spaces to fill out your county, the nearest city, date of the incident, a description of your concern, and driving directions to the location of your concern. All of this information is required. Especially in rural areas, it may be hard to rely on street addresses or landmarks to identify your concern location and the DNR is more likely to conduct a thorough investigation of your concern if they can visit the site in question.

### **Tips for Describing Your Environmental Concern**

- Include the date and time that you witnessed the environmental concern incident
  - If the incident (e.g. an algal bloom) occurred before you witnessed it, include any details that may indicate when it occurred (e.g. “I didn’t observe any algae in the creek last week”)
  - If the concern is ongoing (e.g. increased animal/manure odor), describe the duration of the concern (e.g. “We’ve noticed increasingly strong manure odors when the wind blows East for the past two weeks”)
- Explain in detail what you are experiencing/experienced
  - Include sights, sounds, and smells associated with the incident or concern
  - Provide comparison with what is “normal” (e.g. “I often observe fish swimming in this creek when I walk by in the morning, but today I saw about eight dead fish along the bank and none swimming in the water.”)
- Provide as much contextual information as you can
  - If you suspect pollution of a water body, provide its name (e.g. Shady Creek)
  - If the environmental concern took place on a specific property, provide its name (e.g. Fisher Hog Farms)
  - If the environmental concern was observed along a roadway, name the roadway (e.g. off to the left about six miles East down County Road 171)
- Mention any recent or unusual events that may have an environmental impact
  - Weather events like heavy rainfalls, storms, and flooding
  - New property owners, land development, farms and other facilities in the area
  - Other pollution events

There is also optional information that you may also include in your environmental concern. As a general rule of thumb, the DNR will do a more thorough investigation of your concern if you provide more information. You have the option to include the name and contact information for the ‘Responsible Party of Property Owner’. This is the person or facility you think is responsible for your environmental concern. You do not have to be certain that this party is responsible to provide their contact information; the DNR will investigate the party before taking any enforcement action. Even if this party is not responsible, the conversation may give the DNR more information about the concern and lead to a more thorough investigation.

Your contact information is also optional. The DNR can only inform you of the outcome of the concern investigation and/or ask for additional information regarding your concern if you share

your contact information. However, environmental concern forms may be disclosed to the public under the Missouri Sunshine Law. Therefore, you should not provide any personal information that you wish to keep private. Note that even if you choose to provide personal contact information on the Environmental Concern Form, your address is optional.

<b>Reporting Environmental Concerns</b>	
Required Information	Optional Information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● County</li> <li>● Nearest city</li> <li>● Date of incident</li> <li>● Description of concern</li> <li>● Driving directions to the location of your concern</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Responsible party or property owner               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Contact information</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Your personal contact information</li> <li>● Photos and/or videos of the environmental concern</li> </ul>

## 2. Reporting By Phone

If you call in your environmental concern, you should include all of the same information that you would in the online form. Again, some information is optional but may help the DNR conduct a thorough investigation and help you hold them accountable for following up on your concern. See the sample phone script below for an idea of how to report an environmental concern over the phone. You may also use this script to guide you when reporting an environmental emergency.

### Phone Script for Reporting an Environmental Concern

Note that your call may need to be redirected to the appropriate office and staff member. Make sure to write down the full name of the staff member to whom you report your environmental concern in case you need to follow up with the DNR. The staff member taking your call may respond throughout and/or prompt you to provide information with their own questions – especially if you forget to include required information. It is ok if you do not follow this script exactly, but it should guide you through the conversation and help you remember what information is important.

*“Hi, I’m trying to reach the [name of your regional DNR office] to report an environmental concern in [name of your county]. (Optional: My name is [your name].) May I ask who I am speaking with?”*

Once you have confirmed the name of the staff member, you will describe your concern. Note that you may report an environmental concern that you observed outside your county of work/residence. If so, you will want to modify the first sentence below. For example:

*“Yes, I live/work in [name of county] near [name of closest city]. On [date], I observed/started to observe [description of concern] at [description of concern location]. You can reach this location by [to the best of your ability, provide driving directions from the nearest town or major intersection to the concern location]. I believe [name of responsible party] owns this property and may be responsible for the concern. [Provide any contact information for the responsible party (name, phone number, email address, street address, facility name, permit number) that you may have].”*

The DNR must follow up on your environmental concern with an investigation. They may not be obligated to do so, but you may request that the investigator takes site photos, tests water quality, and/or contacts the responsible party regarding your environmental concern. If you want the DNR to follow up with you regarding your concern report, be sure to provide your contact information.

*“(Optional: I would like to request that you [take site photos, test the creek for E. coli, etc.] regarding my environmental concern. Please contact me at [phone number and/or email address] with the outcome of your investigation or if you need any additional information to complete your investigation.)”*

Otherwise, you may end the conversation by saying something like:

*“I would prefer to report this environmental concern anonymously. (Optional: [your reason for remaining anonymous].) Thank you for your time and diligence in investigating my concern.”*

## **Department of Natural Resources Environmental Concern Investigations**

The regional office of the Department of Natural Resources that receives your environmental concern report will follow up with a [concern investigation](#). To conduct an investigation, DNR staff visit the concern location to assess: 1) the validity of the concern, and 2) the cause and impact of the concern (if the concern is determined to be valid). While there is a standard procedure for investigating environmental concerns, the extent of the investigation relies in part on the information that you provide in your report and in part on whether DNR staff sees evidence of a concern. If they do not see evidence of your concern, DNR staff will not conduct extensive water quality tests, take site photos, or determine a responsible party/property owner.

When the environmental concern report pertains to a water pollution concern, DNR staff use visual and olfactory observations like [Discolored and/or Foul-Smelling Water](#), [Fish Kills](#), and odors to determine if there may be possible contamination. They may take photos if there is

visual evidence of a pollution concern (e.g. discolored water or discharge). Then, they will use a test kit to sample water upstream and downstream of the concern location for pH, dissolved oxygen (DO) and other baselines water quality indicators. If their observations and water quality tests support the content of the concern, then the staff may conduct additional tests based on the suspected concern (e.g. if the concern is CAFO waste, they may test for nitrates, phosphorus, *E. coli*).

If the DNR site investigation supports a pollution concern, DNR staff will attempt to locate its source. If you identify a responsible party/property owner and their contact information in your environmental concern report, this gives the DNR a place to start. Once the DNR locates the source of the concern, they will determine the appropriate [enforcement action](#) for the responsible party/property owner. Typically, the DNR takes a “compliance assistance” approach to help violators understand environmental regulations and avoid future violations. Unfortunately, this means that the Department rarely issues fines or revokes permits – even for repeat violators.

The results of the investigation (including any enforcement action) will be recorded and kept at the appropriate regional office. If you provide your contact information, the DNR should follow up with you directly to share the findings of their concern investigation and any enforcement actions they may have taken. You may try calling the regional office and ask to follow up on an environmental concern report if you do not hear back within a week or two.

Even if you have not submitted an environmental concern report, you can request access to these documents under the Missouri Sunshine Law or request to review them at a regional office. Letters of Warning (LOW) and Notices of Violation (NOV) – two enforcement actions taken by the DNR – are searchable in [this database](#); however, the documents themselves must also be requested via Sunshine. To search for water violations, choose ‘Water Pollution Control – WPP’ from the dropdown menu for ‘Program’.