

# Land

## Fact sheet



Environment Protection Authority Victoria (EPA Victoria) is the state's independent environmental regulator. Under the powers of the *Environment Protection Act 1970*, EPA is responsible for protecting the environment and the community through effective regulation of industry and pollution. EPA's vision is a healthy environment that supports a liveable and prosperous Victoria. As part of its *5 Year Plan* EPA is committed to ensuring land is safely managed, restored to productive use or protected to prevent future contamination.

**PUBLICATION 1466  
JULY 2012**

Authorised and published by  
EPA Victoria, 200 Victoria Street, Carlton.

## What is land pollution?

Land pollution is the degradation of land surfaces caused by human activities. It is a global problem, often associated with industrialisation. Becoming aware of the many causes of land pollution and its harmful effects on environmental and human health is an important step in understanding how it can be prevented.

Some of the main contributors to land pollution are:

- oil refineries
- industrial factories
- pesticides, chemical fertilizers and herbicides used in farming
- littering
- illegal dumping
- landfills
- human sewage
- oil and anti-freeze leaking from cars.

## EPA's role in regulating land pollution

EPA has a key role in protecting the community from land pollution through:

- managing contaminated sites
- hosting a list of potentially contaminated sites it is managing
- tackling illegal dumping and
- regulating landfills.

## Contaminated sites

EPA has a key responsibility in managing contaminated sites. Contaminated sites are land or the water beneath

(known as groundwater), where chemical and metal concentrations exceed those specified in policies and regulations.

Historically, in the absence of environmental regulation, waste and chemical handling at industrial premises left a legacy of site contamination. Land contaminated by former waste disposal, industrial and similar activities is frequently discovered during changes to land uses, for example, from industrial to residential use. In most cases these can be managed at the time the change of land use occurs.

Some sites, however, present an unacceptable risk to human health or to the environment and must be dealt with as a priority. Such sites are typically subject to clean up and/or management under EPA directions.

EPA is reviewing its approach to contaminated land management in Victoria. The contaminated land strategy will:

- improve the transparency of management of contaminated environments and their impacts
- enforce the law to ensure contaminated environments are safely managed
- support the conversion of contaminated environments to assets
- learn from the past to prevent future problems.

The strategy will provide EPA with an action plan to identify priority sites and establish processes to safely manage contaminated land and, where possible,

## REPORTING LAND POLLUTION

To report land pollution, including suspected illegal dumping call EPA's 24-hour Pollution Hotline on **1300 EPA VIC (1300 372 842)**.

Visit [epa.vic.gov.au](http://epa.vic.gov.au) for more information on land pollution.

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restore it to productive use.

EPA is not the sole authority for dealing with contaminated land in Victoria. EPA is not responsible for undertaking environmental assessments or cleaning up contaminated sites. In fact, only around 20 per cent of situations involving contaminated sites are dealt with through the environment protection framework, the rest are covered by state planning through the Department of Planning and Community Development. Local councils administer it.

## Priority Sites Register

EPA has information about contaminated sites subject to a clean-up or pollution abatement notice.

These sites are publicly available on the Priority Sites Register (PSR). Sites are removed from the PSR when the requirements of a notice have been complied with. The register is available for public view at [www.epa.vic.gov.au](http://www.epa.vic.gov.au)

The PSR is not a listing of all contaminated sites in Victoria, nor is it a list of all contaminated sites of which EPA has knowledge.

The PSR does not list sites managed by voluntary agreement or sites subject to management by planning controls (for example, sites managed by councils in accordance with the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*).

## Illegal dumping

Illegal dumping is the disposal of waste on public or private land or into water without a licence, permit or approval from EPA or a local council.

Illegal dumping is unsightly and puts health and safety at risk, especially when hazardous chemicals or asbestos are involved. Offenders conducting illegal waste activities also avoid paying disposal fees, licence fees and the landfill levy, and illegal operators undermine the operation of the waste market by undercutting legitimate businesses.

EPA's Illegal Dumping Strikeforce program is aimed at helping stamp out illegal dumping in Victoria.

Members of the Strikeforce team respond to reports of illegal dumping from the community, work with local councils and gather intelligence to measure and track illegal dumping. The team weeds out rogue operators found to be financially profiting from illegally dumping waste. The actions these people take not only threaten the environment but financially undermine legitimate licensed waste operators.

## Landfills

Landfills are an important part of Victoria's waste management infrastructure. EPA's policy requires a high level of landfill design and management to ensure the environment and community is protected.

EPA sets environmental objectives and best-practice measures for landfill operators to ensure today's landfills do not leave an unacceptable environmental legacy for future generations.

In most cases an EPA works approval is needed before a landfill can be constructed and a licence is required to operate. The licence sets out the expected performance, how the landfill will operate and monitoring requirements to ensure environmental performance.

