

# Reporting Air Quality Problems

## Who Can Report Air Quality Complaints?

You can help SCAQMD protect public health in the South Coast Air Basin by calling 1-800-CUT SMOG® (1-800-288-7664) to report your observations of smoking vehicles as well as excessive odors, smoke, dust, or other air contaminants.



## Why You Should Report Air Quality Problems

Many businesses operating in the South Coast Air Basin that are sources of air pollution must comply with SCAQMD rules and regulations, permits and conditions of operation. These requirements are designed to protect air quality and public health. Despite a business owner/operator's best efforts to comply with these requirements, equipment breakdowns and process upsets do occur. During these conditions, excess emissions may occur that can affect neighboring communities, schools and other businesses.



## How To Make A Complaint

### ► IDENTIFY THE AIR QUALITY PROBLEM AND ITS SOURCE

If you smell a strong odor or see a lot of dust or smoke in your neighborhood, think of ways to describe the emissions and try to identify their source.

For example, if you smell a strong odor, you might be able to associate it with rotten eggs, spoiled cabbage, burned plastic, ammonia, chlorine, garlic, asphalt, or some other familiar material. Think of words that clearly describe the odor (like oily, musty, metallic, pungent, smoky, sweet, or sour).

### ► CALL 1-800-CUT SMOG (1-800-288-7664)

Next, call 1-800-CUT SMOG to report your observations. SCAQMD accepts 1-800-CUT-SMOG complaint calls 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

### Calls go through our automated system which:

- Welcomes you to the South Coast Air Quality Management District, then
- Asks you to press the number 2 to report Air Quality Problems.

### When you call to report excessive odors, smoke, dust, or other air contaminants...

- During business hours (7 a.m. – 5:30 p.m., Tuesday through Friday) your call is routed to an attendant who will ask for the following information:
  - The time and date the air quality problem occurred, and whether it is continuing at the time of your call
  - The nature of the air quality problem (excessive odors, smoke, dust, or other air contaminants)
  - The name and address of the alleged source and the nature of its operation
  - Your name, address, and phone number. This information is kept confidential, unless needed for a legal hearing. Although we accept complaints from anonymous callers, inspectors cannot contact such callers for additional details or to advise them of findings, if any, from follow-up investigations.

- During non-business hours (on Mondays, weekends, or holidays or after 5:30 p.m. Tuesday through Friday)
  - Press the number 2 for Air Quality Complaints;
  - An automated voice will ask you for the same information listed above.

The automated system routes the information you provide to a standby supervisor who reviews the complaint and takes appropriate action. Unless the air quality incident appears to pose a particularly serious threat to the health or safety of the public, the supervisor may not dispatch an SCAQMD inspector for follow-up until the next business day.

Some complaints we receive concern problems over which we have little or no jurisdiction, or involve air pollution to only a minor degree. Examples include, but are not limited to complaints arising from: backyard disputes between residential neighbors, naturally occurring contaminants like blowing dust, or emissions of very low concentrations of pollutants that could affect an extremely sensitive individual without having an impact on the broader community.

Although our inspectors may be unable to take action in these cases, they will investigate each complaint as appropriate. If necessary, they will refer your complaint to those government agencies with more direct oversight.

### When you call to report a smoking vehicle...

- During business hours (7 a.m. – 5:30 p.m., Tuesday through Friday) your call is routed to an attendant who will ask for the following information:
  - License plate number of smoking vehicle;
  - Vehicle make or model; and
  - When (date and time) and where (city and cross streets) smoking vehicle was observed.



- During non-business hours (on Mondays, weekends, or holidays or after 5:30 p.m. Tuesday through Friday)
  - Press the number 1 for Smoking Vehicles.
  - An automated voice will ask you for the same information listed above.
- Verizon and AT&T mobile phone subscribers can access the automated system toll free by simply pressing “#” SMOG (7664).

SCAQMD checks the information you provide against Department of Motor Vehicles records to determine the name and mailing address of the vehicle’s registered owner. SCAQMD then sends the owner an advisory letter describing when and where the vehicle was seen smoking, and recommending vehicle maintenance or repair to help “cut smog.” The letter also asks the registered owner to return a postage-paid form telling SCAQMD what has been done to reduce visible emissions from the vehicle.



## How SCAQMD Handles Your Complaint

Unless you request otherwise, the SCAQMD inspector assigned to your complaint will most likely call you first for additional information before beginning an investigation.

An SCAQMD inspector can only confirm the alleged source of excessive odors, smoke, dust or other air contaminants if the inspector:

- Smells the odors or sees the dust, smoke, or other air contaminants as they are being emitted;
- Traces the odors, dust, smoke, or other air contaminants back to the alleged source and verifies that it alone is the actual source, AND
- Confirms that these emissions are identical to those you described in your complaint.

Some emissions – particularly odors that may last for a very short period of time – fade so fast that they are hard to detect, trace, and confirm. When emissions like these are reported, there may be no further follow-up action beyond the initial call from the SCAQMD inspector.

Where emissions occur continuously or repeatedly over a period of time, however, where they linger, or when a number of people complain about the same air quality problem, an immediate investigation of the alleged source may be necessary.

Once an SCAQMD inspector detects, traces, and confirms the emissions and verifies their source, the inspector conducts a facility inspection to identify the cause of the air quality problem. The inspector documents the inspection findings and takes enforcement action as necessary.



## Complaint Guidelines Summary

- SCAQMD maintains a toll-free complaint line, 24 hours a day: 1-800-CUT-SMOG.
- The names and addresses of people making complaints will be kept confidential.
- Letters are sent to registered owners of smoking vehicles requesting that repairs be made.
- Follow-up on other air quality complaints may include telephone contact, field investigation, and enforcement action as necessary.



@SouthCoastAQMD



**South Coast Air Quality Management District**

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1 800-CUT-SMOG® (1-800-288-7664)

*Cleaning the air that we breathe...*

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