

Operational Information Note

Fire Water Run Off

Introduction

Fire water run-off can transport hazardous materials, affecting humans, animals or the environment. **Incident Commanders (IC) should minimise the impact of fire service actions on any identified environmental risk.**

Legal Considerations

Fire and rescue services can be prosecuted and be liable for clean-up costs if their actions cause or worsen pollution, the legal exemptions are:

- A discharge is made in an emergency to avoid danger to human health
- All reasonably practicable steps were taken to minimise pollution
- The relevant environment agency is informed of the incident as soon as possible

Operational Considerations

Hierarchy

Hierarchy	Activity	Description
1	Containment at source	The most effective intervention point is where the source of pollution can be controlled or stopped.
2	Containment close to source	The next point of intervention is as close to the source as possible.
3	Containment on the surface	The most common way for contaminants to enter the environment is via drainage systems.
4	Containment in drainage system	Pollutants may be contained in drainage systems if they have already entered the system.
5	Containment on or in watercourse	The deployment of booms on a watercourse downstream of an incident is of significant benefit where a pollutant floats.

Operational Tactics

- Request HMEPA support for significant environmental risk and carry out a National Environmental Risk Assessment (see NERA OIN)
- Inform the Environment Agency of the type and quantity of contaminant as soon as possible
- Communicate any risk to the environment to those attending or relevant agencies
- Use Hierarchy of control to inform tactical plan (table above)

Containment

Unless it results in a significant increase in the potential risk to human health, apply these principles:

- Contaminants, contaminated water and associated wastes should be contained either at the scene, for example in a holding tank and/or by blocking drains, or remotely off site, e.g. a STW storm tank. Identify the contaminants prior to disposal.

Disposal

During the early stages of an incident when the fire service activities are more dynamic, it may not always be possible to contain fire water safely. In these circumstances, consider use of the foul sewer for disposal. Control the flow rate to avoid the foul sewer overflowing.

Recycling

HMEPA should be requested before recycled fire water run-off is used as a tactic and on the completion of a NERA. This tactic could be used in conjunction with other operational considerations (see Controlled Burn OIN)

When recycling fire water run-off the following considerations should be borne in mind:

- Use of unattended monitors and smooth bore branches to avoid blockages
- Contaminated PPE and equipment should be decontaminated in accordance with FRS decontamination guidance and following advice from HMEPA
- Adoption and communication of Health & Safety measures including washing of hands, no eating, drinking, smoking.

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