

Fact sheet:

Incident air monitoring



Environment
Protection
Authority Victoria



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Fact sheet

Overview

EPA's incident air monitoring is conducted using portable air monitoring equipment that can be deployed by both EPA staff and SES volunteers during a major air pollution incident. It provides up-to-date air quality information for community and other agencies working during an emergency.

An emergency incident can include community exposure to smoke from fires, hazardous materials incidents, planned burns or other sources. EPA shares the incident air quality data with the public via its AirWatch website: epa.vic.gov.au/airwatch

Where does EPA locate incident air monitoring equipment during an emergency?

EPA decides where to locate the air monitoring equipment.

Equipment is generally sited near the community to help us understand the air quality where people are likely to be affected.

Other factors which affect equipment location:

- current and forecasted wind direction and weather
- topography
- expected duration of the event
- safety of staff setting up the equipment.

What equipment does EPA have and how long does it take to deploy?

EPA can monitor up to three incidents at the same time, anywhere in Victoria.

When incident air monitoring is requested, the time it takes to deploy air monitoring equipment can vary, and depends on factors such as the type and location of the incident.

It can take up to 24 hours to get equipment to the site.

How long does it take to get air quality data?

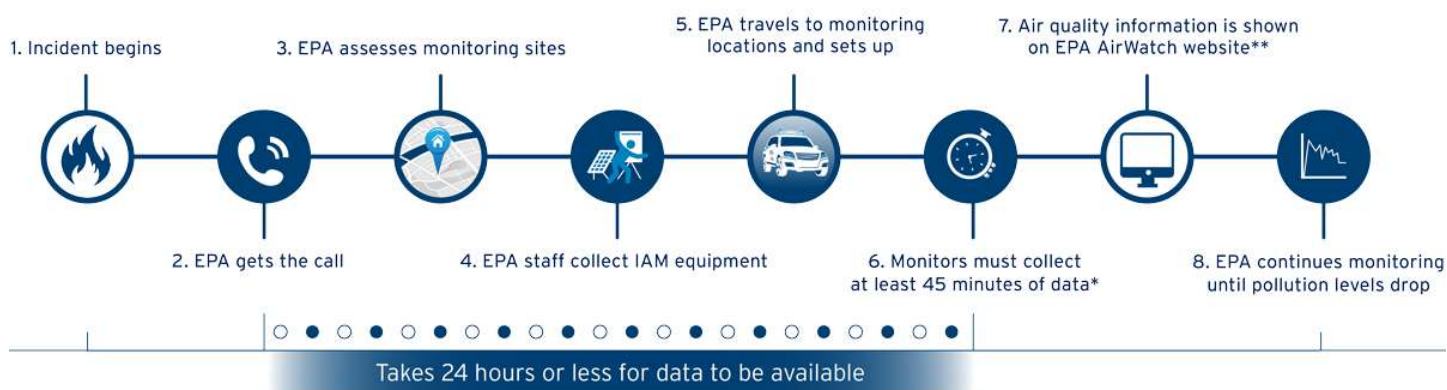
From the time EPA starts collecting air quality data, it can take up to 2.5 hours for the first air quality data to appear publicly on the EPA AirWatch website.

More information and updates

- Incident information and updates: epa.vic.gov.au/emergency-information
- If you are experiencing any symptoms that may be due to smoke exposure seek medical advice or contact NURSE ON CALL:
1300 60 60 24
- Up-to-date air quality information epa.vic.gov.au/airwatch
- General information: epa.vic.gov.au
- Contact EPA on
1300 372 842 (24hrs)
(1300 EPA VIC)
or epa.vic.gov.au



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I can see smoke from my window, but AirWatch is reporting good air quality in my area – what’s going on?

EPA’s permanent and incident air monitoring equipment are located at ground level and only provide data on air quality at that level.

Often smoke plumes rise straight up, meaning there is little to no impact on the air quality at ground level. This is more likely where the fire is burning at especially high temperatures.

In other weather conditions, when a layer of cool air is covered by warm air, smoke may become ‘trapped’, and unable to rise. This can result in poor air quality at ground level during fire events.

I can smell smoke from the incident – is my health at risk?

During an emergency, EPA publishes all health warnings on its website.

There is also general advice about smoke available on EPA’s website: epa.vic.gov.au/smoke

During an incident, EPA advises that if you can smell smoke and are at no risk from fire, you should try to avoid smoke by staying inside. Avoiding the area, if possible, is also recommended.

I feel unwell and think it might be caused by the smoke/poor air quality – what should I do?

EPA cannot provide personal health advice. If you feel unwell or are concerned about your health, please seek medical advice from your doctor, or alternatively contact NURSE-ON-CALL on 1300 60 60 24.

Is it safe for my pet to be outside?

During smoky conditions, and if practical to do so, bring pets indoors with you. If you have any concerns about the health of your pets, please consult your local vet.

Does EPA move its equipment as the wind changes?

EPA generally does not move or relocate stations during an emergency event.

This is because cautionary health advice is based on the collection of 24-hours’ worth of PM_{2.5} data. EPA needs a minimum of 18 hours to start calculating the 24-hour rolling average number that can be translated into health advice.

Where there is a significant shift in wind direction, which may carry smoke towards another community, EPA may deploy more equipment.

Situations when EPA may not be able to deploy air monitoring equipment

Occasionally, there are circumstances when EPA may not deploy air monitoring equipment during an incident. This could be due to:

- a fire that is likely to burn for a short period of time, usually less than one day
- forecasting that shows that smoke is unlikely to impact population centres
- hazardous conditions that mean it’s not safe to deploy the equipment.