

Guidance for communities

If your neighbourhood is affected by odour, here is a helpful guide to support you to improve your quality of life and effect positive change.



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Gather your neighbours

Although possible, it is much harder and rare for one person alone to address an odour issue that is affecting their neighbourhood. Communities are much stronger and more effective when they pull together.

It is useful to approach your neighbours, family, friends and colleagues and discuss if they have noticed any issues with odour in the area, if so how is it affecting them. Once you have a core group you can start to plan how to recruit a wider group. Each member can reach out to their networks including local schools, businesses and social groups. You could also put up posters and distribute flyers in the area.

A note of caution: rarely do any industries or services deliberately emit excess odours and some are unavoidable. Please exercise diplomacy, manners and respect when designing and distributing any materials and avoid inflammatory or derogatory content.



Agree on a common goal

As a group of concerned neighbours you should agree on what you all want to achieve from any action you may take. For example, are you seeking to lobby the authorities to take action against a local industry? Do you need to identify where the odour is coming from? Is there anything individuals can do to reduce the odour? Campaigns are more likely to be successful if you agree on a simple and clear plan of action with an achievable end goal.

These issues are best discussed and decided through a public meeting where all are invited to have their say with one person acting as chair to facilitate the meeting and another person taking notes. You could hold a brainstorming session to identify all possible goals or aims and if there is no general consensus, then a vote on the issues raised could be held to produce a list in order of importance or urgency. By involving all the community members equally and at the beginning of the process, you are more likely to increase enthusiasm and maintain interest in the longer term.

A good way to attract more support and attention is to design a catchy logo and slogan, using the goal of the campaign. This will help to spread the message and make your efforts identifiable. If you are using social media it is also helpful to agree on a hashtag so your posts are united and therefore more powerful.

Guidance for communities



Gather evidence

You may be in a situation where you need to prove to the industry, service provider or the authorities that there is an odour problem that is impacting your community. The most affordable and easiest way to do this is through citizen science.

Digital - [OdourCollect](#) is a free application that you can use on your mobile phone or via the website. You can record episodes of odour as they happen and create a database of observations across your community. To use OdourCollect:

- download from the [GooglePlay](#) (Android) or the [AppStore](#) (iphone)
- register with your email, a username and password
- check your emails to verify your account

Now you are ready to record odours:

- open the app
- add a new odour (your phone should record your location)
- choose the type of the odour perceived
- give a score of how strong the odour is (intensity)
- give a score of how pleasant or unpleasant the odour is
- add how long you have noticed the odour - for this particular episode
- you can also add any comments.

Not everyone feels comfortable being online and sometimes pen and paper is the most popular way to engage a wider group. If you want to record odours within your community, then you can keep a diary of when the smell is good or bad, rating it from 1-5 and recording the type of odour. You can use [this template](#) of a suggested form to complete. You will need a digital champion within your group to collect this information and transfer it to OdourCollect in order to share the odour observations with others. Alternatively you can collate all the information manually but this is a much harder task and more difficult to share with the rest of the community or the industry, regulator, researcher or policy maker you might like to liaise with.

It is advisable to involve as many people as possible in collecting evidence - not only to increase the number of observations, but also to include a range of different sensitivities to odour. In other words - not everyone can be wrong!

Guidance for communities



Devise a plan of action

Together with your community, you should devise a plan of action to achieve your common goal(s). It is helpful to consult and involve a large group of people if possible to be able to spread the efforts and responsibility among more people. Agreeing on an action plan at an early stage helps to unify your group and increases your chances of achieving your goals by all moving in the same direction.

During this step it is useful to identify other players in the process, decision makers, change makers, influencers etc. Your plan could be to monitor odours and approach authorities or emitting industries to ask for their cooperation or offer your person-power to further monitor odour impact. It could also take other forms such as raising awareness of when the odour is usually particularly strong so the community can reduce their personal exposure to it.



Identify further support networks

The data collection and taking action may take time and can be ongoing so it is also useful to reach out to existing groups and networks who may be able to support you in your mission. They may circulate your story to gather more evidence or recruit more individuals, or be able to provide advice and support in progressing towards your goal. The easiest way to identify these groups, if you have access to the internet, is to search for local groups, NGOs or even social media accounts with a similar aim or location to you. Alternatively you can enquire at the local library, the town hall, look up directories or ask local schools or businesses if they are aware of any local groups.

Guidance for communities



Approach authorities/ policy makers and present your situation

When you are at the stage where you have gained local support; have an idea of the extent of the issue; and have gathered evidence of an odour problem you can present your findings to the local authority or regulating agency. Of course, it is possible and perfectly acceptable to approach these organisations sooner, however, you will be in a stronger position to present your concerns and challenge any decisions when more equipped with facts and the backing of the community. It is also advisable to do your research, for example, knowing which regulations apply and how many people are being affected.

Different countries and districts have different people or departments responsible for odour complaints. It will save time in the long run if you can research who you should be liaising with at the beginning of the process if possible. Contact the relevant authority and request the contact details for the specific department and person responsible, this could be public health, the environment or even commerce. Ideally arrange a meeting with them where you can present your case and ask what action has been or will be taken. Select two or three representatives from the community to attend the meeting who are good at communicating - but don't forget to feed back to the rest of the group later.

The ideal scenario would be to work out and agree an action plan moving forward to reduce or manage the odour. It is important to appreciate the complexities, costs and time involved with reducing or eliminating odour and so due patience and understanding should be exercised when agreeing on next steps.



Approach odour emitting industry or service

Depending on your specific situation, it might be effective to approach the organisation or industry who are responsible for emitting the odour and ask for their cooperation. This could be especially relevant if the industry is small and local, i.e. part of the community, where a conversation would be more acceptable than involving the authorities. Please consider your personal safety and the implications this may have on others in your group, such as employees of the industry. This decision should be taken by the action group as a whole, not on an individual level.

Invariably, the industry or service is fulfilling a local need, either for the service it provides and or the employment opportunities. They are not the enemy - solutions and mitigation measures are much more likely to be achieved if all parties can work together.