

Air Quality in Mount Maunganui



We know the Mount Maunganui community are concerned about air quality in their neighbourhood. That is why in November 2018 we committed to spending \$500,000 a year to accurately monitor air quality in the Mount Maunganui industrial area.

The 11 air quality monitors are spread throughout the industrial area where pollution is most concentrated. These monitors are running 24/7 and check for a range of pollutants like fine dust, hydrogen sulfide and sulphur dioxide. This data and more information about our monitoring programme is available online at www.boprc.govt.nz/mountindustrial



The data shows that air quality in the area is reasonable, and with less exceedances for fine dust being recorded, appears to be improving. What this data doesn't speak to however is odour. We know that for many who live, work or play in this area odour can be a significant issue, and negatively impact mental health. We go into more detail about odour over the page.

What is air pollution?

Air pollution is a complex mix of tiny particles and gases that can be produced naturally or from human activity. The main sources of air pollution in New Zealand are wood and coal fires (for home heating), motor vehicles, industrial emissions, open burning and natural sources such as sea salt, sand, pollen and soil. Fine, dust like, particles are the main pollutant of concern across New Zealand, especially over winter where in colder parts of the country home heating causes regular exceedances of the National Environmental Standards.



Pine pollen sample from Mount Maunganui

What is a polluted airshed?

An airshed puts a boundary around an area to allow specific rules to be introduced to help manage and address a problem. We requested Ministry for the Environment introduce an airshed for the Mount industrial area so that we can introduce tighter rules around fine dust. Once the airshed was put in place in November 2019, the area was labelled polluted due to the number of exceedances of fine dust that were recorded in the first year of monitoring.

What's causing all the dust?

The dust that settles in this area, and basically all urban areas, is a mix of both natural and human sources. Dust samples taken on any given day are likely to contain particles from activities associated with the Port of Tauranga like shipping emissions, industrial processes and particles from vehicles such as from the exhaust, tyre, road and brake wear to name a few.

Through our Regional Air Plan and the resource consent process we can put controls in place around some of these activities but many, like shipping or vehicle emissions, and some Port based activities like log activity, we currently cannot.

Is this dust concerning?

In general, the smaller the particle, the greater the health impact. The national rules identify how much dust is allowed to be in the air and are based on what is safe for people to breathe. This is why it is so important that we measure our air quality and make sure levels stay within the limits set by these rules.

More information about the impacts of dust on health can be found at www.mfe.govt.nz by searching 'Why air quality matters'.

What are we doing about the dust?

Dust is a big focus for the Regional Council team who work in this space and they have a number of tools to help them address this problem.

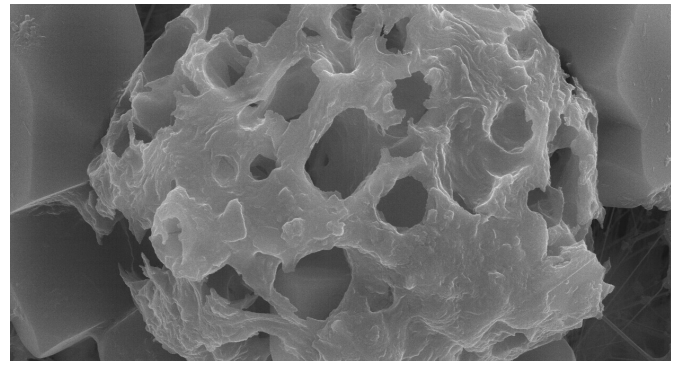
Our Regional Air Plan sets air quality rules that are consistent with national requirements. It's this plan which identifies the threshold for when a resource consent is required, through which we can set specific conditions requiring dust be reduced.

When consents expire, and applicants reapply, we take a fresh look at the activity factoring in the best available information at the time. With technology constantly improving, better air quality data now available and the Mount industrial area now designated as a polluted airshed, this means significant improvements can be made.

We carry out enforcement action when people break the rules or don't comply with their consent conditions. This includes fines and prosecutions.

A lot of good things are happening in the Mount industrial area, with many businesses sealing exposed surfaces, dust fences being installed and technology being improved. We are seeing the effect of this in our monitoring with less exceedances being recorded. However, some of this good work is being partially offset by an increase in traffic and other activities throughout the Mount industrial zone.

Our monitors recorded 16 exceedances of the limits set by the Ministry for the Environment in the first year, 13 in the second year and with year 3 almost complete we've only recorded 6 so far. Even one exceedance is too many, but it's great to see we are moving in the right direction.



Combustion particle

What is the government doing about dust?

The Government is proposing changes to the National Environmental Standards for Air Quality to take into account improved scientific understanding and evidence about the health impacts of fine dust, specifically PM2.5, and to better target controllable sources of air pollution.

These changes which are currently focused around home heating, will impact the Mount industrial area too.

What about all the smells?

Odour is a big issue for this area. Pet food, bitumen, and 'rotten egg' (hydrogen sulphide) are the main smells we get notified about. In the 12 months to 1 September we've received 600 calls to our Pollution Hotline for the Mount industrial area. Of these, 512 relate to odour, 39 to dust and the remaining to industrial, smoke or other discharges.

The rules set by the Council state, if you create an odour as part of your activity, it cannot be 'offensive or objectionable' beyond the property boundary.

We are not able to use a machine to easily test for odours, but instead we rely upon our well trained response staff to physically sense and assess these odours.

Verifying odours is an immensely challenging task as they often disperse quickly depending on the strength and direction of the wind. Despite this, it was calls to the Pollution Hotline which led to the recent successful odour prosecution in this area so we ask that people don't give up and continue to let us know when they're affected by an odour. For us to carry out a prosecution on behalf of ratepayers we require considerable evidence.

If the public are concerned about odours from specific industrial sites, as well as contacting the **Regional Council Pollution Hotline** on **0800 884 883**, a direct approach to the business will help let them know about the impact they are having on the wider Mount Maunganui community.



Why do you allow heavy industry to operate next door to our homes, sports fields, schools and marae?

The Tauranga City Plan sets out how land is zoned. The Mount Maunganui industrial area is identified in this plan as an 'industrial' zone which means it's been set aside for these kind of activities. Tauranga City Council are responsible for land zoning, not Bay of Plenty Regional Council, and they're currently reviewing this Plan working on issues and options for the City Plan to address. These will be presented to the public for feedback in late 2021.

The proximity of the industrial area to Whareroa Marae and the Mount residential area is a key challenge to resolving air quality issues in this area. This situation has been decades in the making with Whareroa marae being established in 1870's and Mount Maunganui having designated industrial zones since the 1940's. The Port and industry grew well before Mount Maunganui became a thriving town and holiday destination.

At the request of Whareroa Marae, Bay of Plenty Regional Council and Tauranga City Council have funded independent consultants to investigate a managed retreat by industry. This is now sitting with Whareroa Marae.

Is the Port of Tauranga expanding?

In May this year, Port of Tauranga applied for a resource consent to extend their existing wharves south, on both the Sulphur Point and Mount Maunganui side of the channel. The area where the extension is being proposed is identified in the Coastal Plan as a 'port zone', a definition which allows for port related activities.

Regional Council have outsourced the processing of this consent to an independent third party. The party processing this consent are currently assessing the information to determine whether it is complete or more information is required. Once it is deemed complete for processing they will make a decision on notification.

What next?

Regional Council is just one part of the solution but are committed to improving air quality in this area. We'll be working alongside Tauranga City Council, Toi te Ora, industry, tangata whenua and the community to continue to make improvements. Being situated next to an industrial area, air quality in the residential area is unlikely to ever be perfect, but human health will always come first and air quality in this area does need to continue to improve.

Bitumen plants

There are three bitumen manufacturing plants in the Mount Industrial area and one site which stores a large volume of bitumen. Bitumen is primarily used for roading and is made in batches by adding aggregate, or small rocks, with a heavy petroleum product and heating it up. The odour can travel quite far, and it's a smell that can be detected even at very low concentrations.

The level of pollutants discharged as part of this process are not triggering health based thresholds near the source, and are diluted the further you are from the source. Instead we are more concerned about mental health impacts related to the uncertainty and worry as a result of the frequency and at times prolonged exposure to such odours.

The two primary bitumen manufacturers located nearest to the residential area are aware that their existing infrastructure is no longer fit-for-purpose and they cannot continue to operate as they are.

Allied Asphalt have committed to building a new fit for purpose plant and Higgins is in the process of investigating their options for the future – including whether they stay on site and keep their current system, stay on site and upgrade their system, or move sites. Both are in the process of renewing or applying for a new consent and are proactively keeping us in the loop with their progress.

This is another win for air quality in the area but again, it will take some time to take effect. A recent example of this is the \$13 million Ballance upgrades at their plant off Hewlett Road. This takes years of planning and months to install.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to reach out to our staff. We're here to help.



To report pollution call 0800 884 883. For an up-to-date look at the work Regional Council is carrying out in this area check out the latest Monitoring and Operations Committee agenda or visit www.boprc.govt.nz/mountindustrial