

Frequently asked questions

Broiler farms and environmental permits

March 2022

Please see below some frequently asked questions previously received in relation to permit applications for broiler farms and our responses, which you may find useful.

What is an Environmental Permit?

Certain activities, that could be harmful to the environment, need an environmental permit to operate. A permit gives the holder permission to carry out certain types of activities at a specific location. It sets conditions which will protect the environment and people's health. If we grant a permit we carry out periodic audits and inspections to check compliance with the permit. We review permit conditions and can change them at any time. We take enforcement action if the permit holder breaks the conditions of their permit.

Is an Environmental Permit the same as planning permission?

Our decision whether to grant an environmental permit is completely separate from the planning process. Planning permission allows a new site to be built. The planning process determines whether the development is an acceptable use of land and considers a broad range of matters such as visual impact, traffic and access, which do not form part of our decision-making process. An environmental permit allows the site to operate once it has been built and regulates emissions from the ongoing activities. A new development will need to have both planning permission and an environmental permit before it can operate. We will only issue a permit if we believe the facility will be designed, constructed and operated in a manner that will not cause significant pollution of the environment or harm to human health.

I have heard that broiler farms can cause problems with flies.

Chickens are on site for approximately 40 days. The permits we issue contain conditions to ensure such a farm is kept as clean and dry as possible through appropriate management practices. Due to the short length of the growing cycle and the way a broiler farm is managed, we would not expect to see an issue with flies. Once the birds have left a farm, all the litter is removed and the sheds are thoroughly cleaned.

In the unlikely event of flies causing annoyance, we will ensure the operator reviews any relevant management practices. In line with permit conditions, they would then submit to us for approval a pest management plan to be implemented on site.

The local council would be the regulating authority if a problem of flies from manure heaps or spreading arose.

What about odour and noise?

The permit would contain conditions that we enforce, ensuring that odour and noise pollution from a broiler farm is kept to a minimum.

Modern broiler farms have to be built using the best available techniques and managed to minimise odour and noise. As a regulator, we ensure that any permit holder complies with permit conditions to keep emissions from such a farm, including odour and noise, to a minimum. We will assess any information submitted with applications and ensure that the odour and noise management and control measures are satisfactory for any proposed farm. In some cases, we may require more information to satisfy our requirements, and we would request this from the applicant through a Schedule 5 Notice before making a decision on whether or not to grant a permit.

At certain times of the process, such as cleaning out, it is possible that some odour will be generated. We would require that a broiler farm takes action in accordance with the management and control measures, to reduce these odours as far as possible.

Some noise can be generated by vehicle movements and the operation of ventilation fans on site. Again, we would require that a broiler farm took action to adhere to noise management conditions to reduce the noise generated from site, as far as possible. These actions would need to be appropriate during the day and at night. However, vehicle movement to and from a site is not regulated by us. This would be taken into consideration by the local council whilst determining the planning application.

We would not issue a permit if we considered odour and noise would be at levels that would cause significant pollution off site

However, we do have experience of broiler farms causing issues with odour and noise when the operator is not taking all appropriate measures. If a broiler farm did cause what we perceive to be odour or noise pollution in the local community, we would ensure the operator investigates alternative control measures and carries out necessary actions to prevent future occurrences.

The permit does not cover any pre-operational activities such as noise or odour from construction.

Details of all documentation submitted with permit applications can be viewed electronically and in hard copy. Details of how and where you can view these documents are set out below.

What about pollution to ground water?

It is an environmental offence to cause pollution to ground or surface waters. Environmental Permits have specific conditions to further enforce against polluting emissions to water or land.

What about waste from the site?

All waste produced from the broiler farm will be regulated by the sites Environmental Permit. The permit contains specific conditions requiring the efficient use of raw materials and minimisation of waste produced by the activities on site.

Do broiler farms spread and store manure on the fields?

Where a broiler farm sends used litter off site, records must be kept showing who has taken the manure and what quantities have been taken. The permit requires that each recipient of the manure agrees to spread the manure in accordance with the Code of Good Agricultural Practice. All amenity issues for spreading or storage of waste off site would be dealt with by the local council.

Although an environmental permit will not regulate the spreading or storing of manure on fields outside of the permitted area, we would expect all manure spreading to be done in accordance with the Code of Good Agricultural Practice and also in compliance with the Nitrate Vulnerable Zone regulations.

Further information on manure spreading and storing can be found here
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/storing-organic-manures-in-nitrate-vulnerable-zones>

What about bioaerosols?

As part of our determination of the permit application we consult Public Health England and the local Director of Public Health to ensure that there will be no harm to human health as a result of any proposed activity. Their response would be taken into consideration when making our final decision on whether or not to grant a permit.

What about emissions from the biomass boilers?

If biomass boilers are used on site to heat poultry sheds, the fuel burnt would be clean/virgin wood. We would assess the potential impact of exhaust emissions (PM10s and NOX) on human health and the environment as part of our determination of the permit.

We must decide whether to grant or refuse an environmental permit under the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2010. We will only grant a permit if the operator applying has shown that the proposed facility meets the requirements of UK and European laws in how it will be designed and run. We will not grant a permit if we believe it is likely to cause significant pollution to the environment or harm people's health.

Do these sites produce much dust?

The use of Best Available Techniques and good practice will ensure dust is kept to a minimum. Emissions of dust would be regulated by us, through the permit. In the event of dust causing pollution, we would require the operator to undertake a review of a site's activities, produce a management plan to be agreed with us and carry out necessary actions to prevent future occurrences.

Is lighting considered as part of the permit?

Lighting is not considered as part of the environmental permit other than with regards to energy use and efficiency.

What about proximity to local residents?

Our guidance states that if there are sensitive receptors within 400 metres of a site then we would expect the operator to have robust Management Plans for odour and noise.

Animal Welfare

Animal welfare is not dealt with by Environmental Permitting Regulations. The operator must comply with appropriate animal welfare standards in its design and operation of a site.

What happens if there are problems with a site?

If a site does not adhere to the management and control measures in place, such as those relating to odour, dust and noise or does not comply with the permit, we will investigate. We will work with the operator to ensure compliance with the permit requirements. In the event of any breaches, we may take action in line with our published Enforcement and Sanctions guidance.

Any incidents or complaints about a site can be made to us on our 24/7 incident hotline 0800 807060.

How you can contribute to us making the best decision

Once we have accepted an application, we put it on our public register, which is held in our local offices and the offices of the relevant council. We will always consult on applications for new bespoke permits and invite people and organisations to comment.

Where can I get further information from?

You can find information about Environmental Permits at

<https://www.gov.uk/topic/environmental-management/environmental-permits>

For further information on our intensive farming guidance please visit our website at

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/intensive-farming-risk-assessment-for-your-environmental-permit>