
Guidelines for assessing the adverse environmental impact of fire effluents —

Part 1: General

*Lignes directrices pour déterminer l'impact environnemental des
effluents du feu —*

Partie 1: Généralités

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Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

The procedures used to develop this document and those intended for its further maintenance are described in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1. In particular, the different approval criteria needed for the different types of ISO documents should be noted. This document was drafted in accordance with the editorial rules of the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2 (see www.iso.org/directives).

Attention is drawn to the possibility that some of the elements of this document may be the subject of patent rights. ISO shall not be held responsible for identifying any or all such patent rights. Details of any patent rights identified during the development of the document will be in the Introduction and/or on the ISO list of patent declarations received (see www.iso.org/patents).

Any trade name used in this document is information given for the convenience of users and does not constitute an endorsement.

For an explanation of the voluntary nature of standards, the meaning of ISO specific terms and expressions related to conformity assessment, as well as information about ISO's adherence to the World Trade Organization (WTO) principles in the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) see www.iso.org/iso/foreword.html.

This document was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 92, *Fire safety*, Subcommittee SC 3, *Fire threat to people and environment*.

This second edition cancels and replaces the first edition (ISO 26367:2011), which has been technically revised.

The main changes compared to the previous edition are as follows:

- Additional terms have been added to [Clause 3](#).
- Revision of [Clause 4.3.2](#).
- Additional examples of recent significant fire incidents were added to [Table A.1](#) in [Annex A](#).

A list of all parts in the ISO 26367 series can be found on the ISO website.

Any feedback or questions on this document should be directed to the user's national standards body. A complete listing of these bodies can be found at www.iso.org/members.html.

Introduction

In view of the fact that relevant quantitative data on environmentally hazardous components of fire effluents cannot routinely be obtained from accidental fires, appropriate data may also have to be obtained from real scale fire tests and simulations involving physical fire models.

General awareness of the fact that large fires present dramatic and persistent adverse effects on the environment has been accentuated by a number of high-impact incidents over the past half-century. [Annex A](#) contains a list of significant fire incidents in recent years.

The serious consequences of such events have confirmed that the environmental impact of fires is an important issue that needs to be dealt with internationally and systematically. This document provides a framework for a common treatment of the environmental impact of fires in answer to this pressing need.

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Guidelines for assessing the adverse environmental impact of fire effluents —

Part 1: General

1 Scope

This document gives guidelines whose primary focus is the assessment of the adverse environmental impact of fire effluents, including those from fires occurring in commercial and domestic premises, unenclosed commercial sites, industrial and agricultural sites, as well as those involving road, rail and maritime transport systems. It is not applicable to direct acute toxicity issues or wildland fires, which are covered by other existing ISO standards.

It is intended to serve as a tool for the development of standard protocols for

- a) the assessment of local and remote adverse environmental impacts of fires, and the definition of appropriate preventive measures,
- b) post-fire analyses to identify the nature and extent of the adverse environmental impacts of fires, and
- c) the collection of relevant data for use in environmental fire hazard assessments.

This document is intended as an umbrella document to set the scene concerning *what* should be considered when determining the environmental impact of fires. It is not a comprehensive catalogue of methods and models defining *how* to determine the environmental impact of fires, intended to be addressed by other parts of ISO 26367.

This document is principally intended for use by firefighters and investigators, building owners and managers, storage facility operators, materials and product manufacturers, insurance providers, environmental regulatory authorities, civil defence organizations and public health authorities.

2 Normative references

The following documents are referred to in the text in such a way that some or all of their content constitutes requirements of this document. For dated references, only the edition cited applies. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies.

ISO 13943, *Fire safety — Vocabulary*

ISO 26367-2, *Guidelines for assessing the adverse environmental impact of fire effluents — Part 2: Methodology for compiling data on environmentally significant emissions from fires*

ISO/TR 26368, *Environmental damage limitation from fire-fighting water run-off*

3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the terms and definitions given in ISO 13943, ISO 26367-2 and ISO/TR 26368 and the following apply.

ISO and IEC maintain terminological databases for use in standardization at the following addresses:

— IEC Electropedia: available at <http://www.electropedia.org/>

— ISO Online browsing platform: available at <https://www.iso.org/obp>

3.1

ecotoxic

harmful to the environment or a specific ecosystem

3.2

ecotoxicity

potential for biological, chemical or physical stressors to affect ecosystems

3.3

enclosed fires

fires which have been ignited and which take place inside an enclosure

Note 1 to entry: This term is particularly important when defining the ventilation conditions in the fire.

3.4

environment

surroundings within which a fire occurs, including air, water, land, natural resources, flora, fauna and humans, and their interrelation

Note 1 to entry: "environment", for the purposes of this document, includes the following:

— *local*: within the perimeter of a burning enclosure (this document is not applicable to burning enclosures during a fire);

— *immediate*: vicinity within a short distance of, e.g. 1 km from the fire and excluding the local area of an enclosure fire;

— *external*: area outside the immediate vicinity of a fire; the extent of this depends on weather conditions and types of emission, i.e. to air, water or land, with short-term or long-term consequences.

Note 2 to entry: Adapted from ISO 14001^[1].

3.5

environmental impact

any change to the environment, whether adverse or beneficial, wholly or partially resulting from an accidental fire

Note 1 to entry: Adapted from ISO 14001^[1].

Note 2 to entry: In this document it is used to signify an *adverse* change to the environment.

3.6

fire effluent

all gases and aerosols, including suspended particles, created by combustion or pyrolysis and emitted to the environment

Note 1 to entry: Adapted from ISO 13943.

Note 2 to entry: It also refers to run-off water generated during firefighting activities.

3.7

fires in ruptured enclosures

fires in enclosures that have been breached and that allow unrestricted emission of the fire smoke plume for environmental distribution

Note 1 to entry: Firefighting tactics in this type of fire are, in some cases, similar to those for an enclosure fire, even though emissions and environmental effects are similar to those for a fire in the open.

3.8**pollutant**

chemical species or particulate that is harmful to the environment

Note 1 to entry: This term includes components of fire effluents that cause short-term or long-term impacts on the environment.

Note 2 to entry: Adapted from ISO 26367-2.

3.9**primary fire effluent**

effluent released directly from the fire

3.10**receptors**

segments of the environment on which accidental fire can have an impact, including air, water, and soil environments, plus flora and fauna associated with these environments, including humans

3.11**run-off**

fluid effluent created through the interaction between a fire and a liquid extinguishing agent and hazardous materials stored or generated on site

3.12**secondary fire effluent**

effluent created through interaction between a primary fire effluent and the environment

3.13**significant incident**

emission, fire or explosion resulting from uncontrolled developments leading to delayed hazardous exposure to humans and/or immediate and delayed hazard to the environment

3.14**unenclosed fires**

fires which initiate and propagate in the open air and those which initiate and propagate within an enclosure that subsequently ruptures and transforms the fire in terms of ventilation conditions and effluent transport mechanisms

4 Fire effluents**4.1 Overview**

The interaction between a fire and its surroundings or environment is illustrated in [Figure 1](#), which shows how fires cause harm to the environment through

- direct gaseous and particulate emissions to the atmosphere,
- spread of atmospheric emissions,
- deposition of atmospheric emissions,
- soil contamination, and
- ground and surface water contamination.

NOTE 1 The contamination can be due to emissions from the fire itself or those associated with the firefighting activities, which was the cause of the greatest environmental impact on the fire in the chemical facility in Basel, Switzerland in 1986 (see [Annex A](#)).

Interaction through thermal radiation is not included in [Figure 1](#). In the case of sensitive environments, this effect should also be taken into account.

The effect of these various emissions depends in part on the transfer mechanism, e.g. the emission of gaseous species and the effect of weather or the emission of contaminated firefighting water and its interaction with the drainage system, and on the specific species, i.e. small gaseous compounds, large particles and the range of species in between. It should also be noted that emissions can undergo chemical changes after emission, e.g. chemical modification of nitrogen oxides (NO_x) in the atmosphere due to ultraviolet (UV) light.

A wide variety of toxic effluents (both primary and secondary) are emitted in fires. These effluents can follow a number of pathways to impact on human, animal or plant receptors. Even for industrial sites, risk assessments cannot take into account all potential impacts.

NOTE 2 [Annex B](#) gives an overview of relevant regulations and guidance documents, for information.

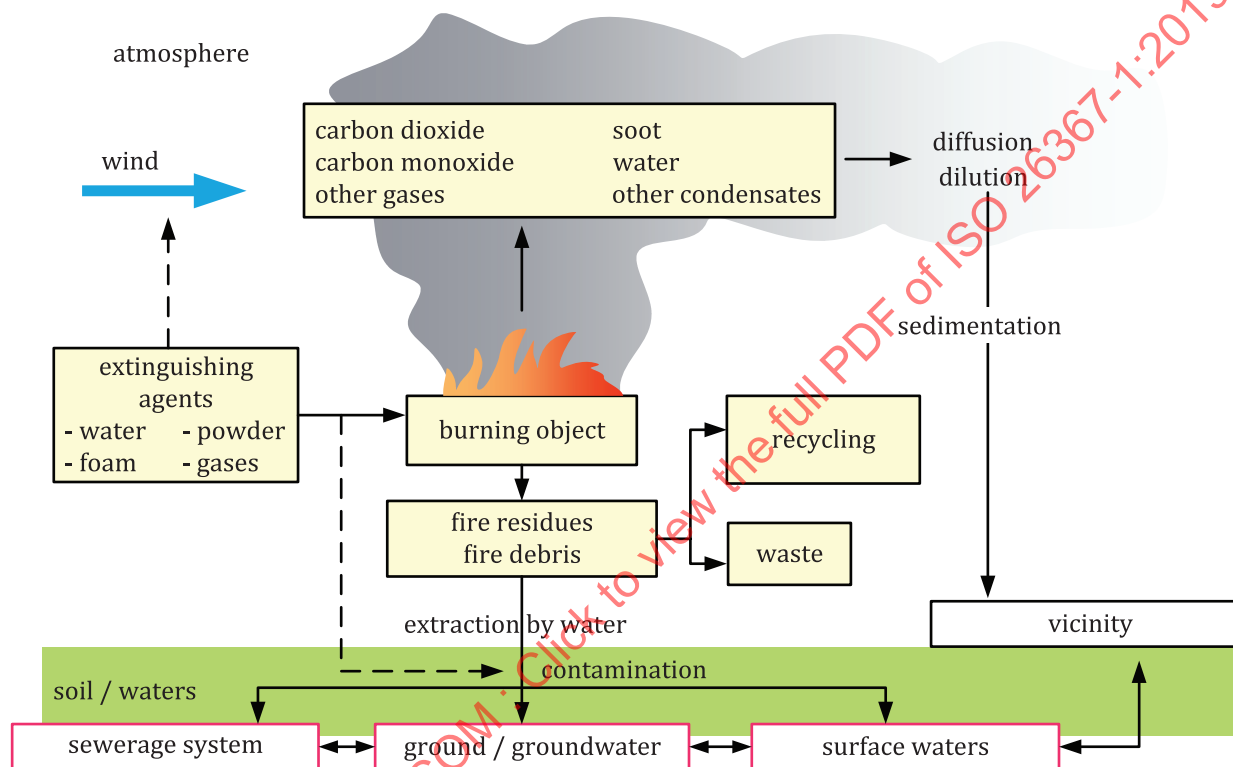


Figure 1 — Emission pathways from fires

4.2 Effluent generation

Initial decomposition is generally through pyrolysis, by which materials are broken down by heat to yield a range of organic by-products that provide the volatile fuel for combustion.

The elemental composition of materials provides guidance when predicting the combustion or decomposition products that can be generated during a fire. The molecular composition or structure of materials can affect combustion efficiency and the mix of organic and inorganic combustion products generated in a fire.

NOTE 1 BS 7982^[2] gives guidance on the environmental impact of large fires involving plastics materials.

The relative yields of combustion and pyrolysis compounds depend mainly upon the combustion conditions. Smouldering fires involve slow thermal decomposition under oxidative non-flaming conditions. These conditions can give rise to fire emissions that are rich in organic compounds. Well-ventilated flaming fires, having a high air/fuel ratio, provide more efficient combustion conditions than vitiated fires. In the context of potential impacts to the environment, large, ventilation-controlled flaming fires are potentially the most environmentally harmful. In an event it is important to consider what is being produced at any given stage in the fire and how this can be emitted to the environment.

For example, species produced under low-temperature conditions in the later stages of a fire combined with a reduced plume height can represent a greater local hazard than those produced under high temperature conditions during the early stages, despite the fact that the yield of species could be higher during those early stages. A possible response to this could therefore be to allow a fire to initially burn and commence firefighting once the fire begins to die down. The advantage of such an approach is that it would allow less firefighting water to be used, thereby making containment easier.

Investigations of emissions from fires indicate that, whereas gases such as carbon monoxide (CO), carbon dioxide (CO₂), hydrogen cyanide (HCN), nitrogen oxides (NO_x) and other irritants are most important from an acute toxicological point of view, organic species of high molecular weight and aerosols, e.g. particulate matter, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) and dioxins, are most significant from an environmental point of view^[3].

NOTE 2 The absolute and relative concentrations of species depend on the ventilation conditions and chemical make-up of the fuel.

NOTE 3 Molecules adsorbed on particles can be environmentally significant even when distant from the fire. Examples include HCl or dioxins adsorbed on particles.

NOTE 4 Water containment issues are addressed in ISO/TR 26368.

The products of combustion interact with the environment through direct emission to the air or through contamination of surface or groundwater and soil. These three emission pathways are discussed in more detail in [4.4](#) to [4.6](#).

The contamination of the surface or groundwater and soil is potentially compounded by the presence of physical fire debris, unburned products, and firefighting agents.

4.3 Fire stages

4.3.1 Background

Large-scale fires are complex events whose behaviour depends on many parameters, including the level of ventilation, fire load, the presence or absence of an enclosure and the burning properties of the combustible materials.

Emissions to the environment are generally more restricted in an enclosure fire than in the case of a fire in the open, owing to the potential for natural containment of fire effluents and firefighting agent within the structure.

4.3.2 Enclosed fire

In agreement with ISO 16733-1^[4], four main stages of fire development within an enclosure are considered, as shown in [Figure 2](#). It is assumed that no intervention by firefighters occurs or active fire protection systems such as sprinklers are activated. Depending on the relative availability of oxygen versus fuel the fire will follow either the “a” path (solid line, well-ventilated flaming, fuel controlled) or it will follow the “b” path (dashed line, under-ventilated, ventilation controlled). Most flaming enclosure fires begin in well-ventilated conditions; however, as the fire grows in relation to the enclosure size, the conditions frequently become ventilation controlled.

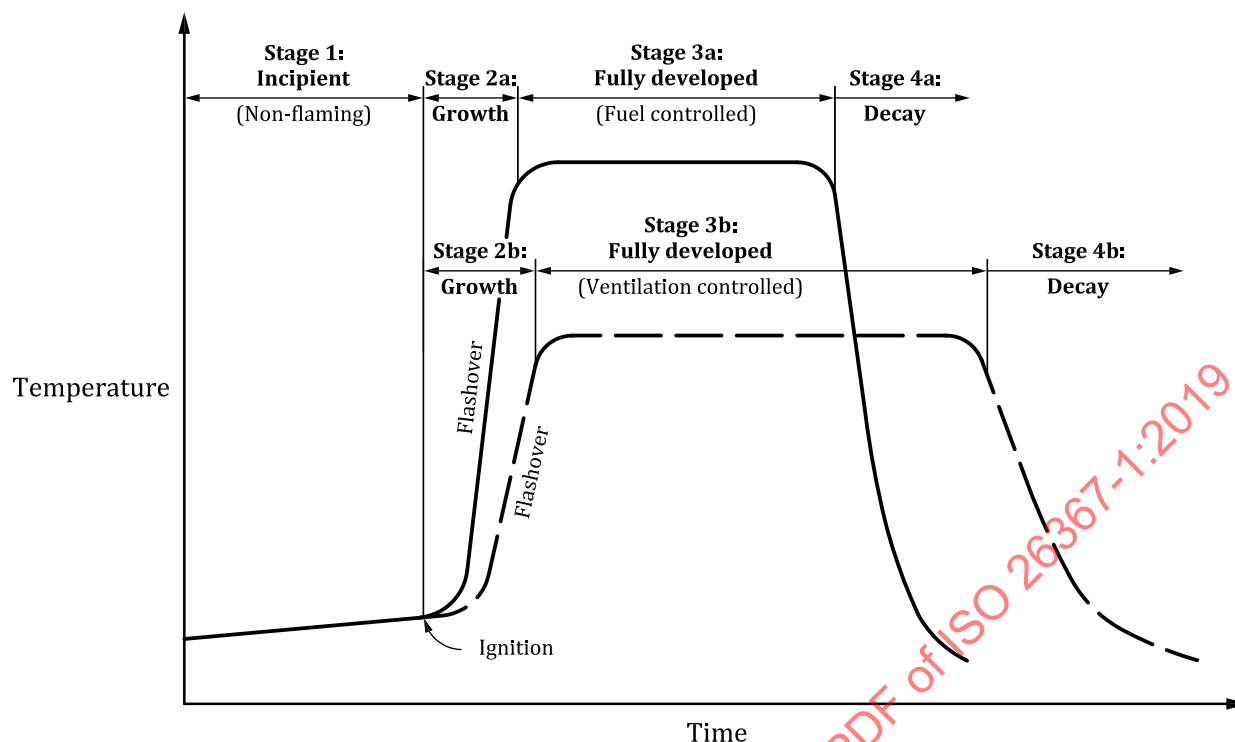


Figure 2 — Potential fire development in an enclosure

4.3.3 Effect of intervention

The environmental impact of firefighting intervention is linked to the stage of the fire during which the intervention takes place: Stage 1, 2, 3 or 4. Table 1 gives a summary of the types of emissions that could be expected from intervention in the various stages shown in Figure 2.

Table 1 — Description of the impact of intervention depending on the stage of the fire episode

Stage	Emissions ^[5]	Impact of intervention
1 Incipient	Thermal decomposition products of involved materials, which could range from non-irritant to carcinogenic depending on the material and presence of oxygen. Can lead to toxic conditions over time.	Local impact only (rapid intervention).
2 Growth	Heat, CO ₂ , water, and small amounts of sooty smoke are generated, forming a layer at the ceiling that descends as the fire grows unless removed by a ventilation system.	Immediate and local impact. If flashover occurs the flames and toxic smoke can spread very quickly to the immediate vicinity of the fire or to the external area beyond. Intervention considerations include letting it burn relatively cleanly versus attempting to extinguish it with water and/or foam.
3 Fully developed	Decreased amounts of CO ₂ and NO _x , but high levels of CO, hydrogen cyanide (HCN), volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and smoke particulates are generated.	Greatest impact, i.e. local, immediate and external environmental impact. Care must be taken not to exacerbate the environmental impact through the intervention, e.g. contamination of surface water from firefighting foam and/or run-off water

NOTE Nitrogen containing compounds (e.g. HCN and NO_x) are produced when the fuel involved in the fire contains nitrogen.

Table 1 (continued)

Stage	Emissions ^[5]	Impact of intervention
4 Decay	Large amounts of effluents have been produced. Fire has begun to self-extinguish if intervention has not been initiated before this point.	Potential for significant impact if effluents have not been contained. There is a risk that large scale (and/or more toxic) emissions and distribution of effluents may occur during the intervention.
NOTE Nitrogen containing compounds (e.g. HCN and NO _x) are produced when the fuel involved in the fire contains nitrogen.		

Clean-up efforts after the fire include removal and disposal of ash, char, smoke and/or water damaged materials, and firefighting media. Off-gassing of pollutants also occurs for some time after the fire has been extinguished^[6].

4.4 Emissions to the air

4.4.1 Background

The dispersion of the fire plume within the atmosphere causes

- elevated concentrations of airborne pollutants,
- increased risk from exposure to airborne pollutants, and
- reduced visibility.

Apart from reducing visibility and obstructing firefighting operations, particulate atmospheric emission results in a pervasive reduction in environmental quality and in potential long-term toxicity. Airborne particle matter with a mass median aerodynamic diameter of 10 µm or less (PM₁₀) and 2,5 µm or less (PM_{2.5}) present an important potential environmental problem due to their direct effect on the respiratory system and to their transport of carcinogenic organic species such as PAHs, dioxins and furans, as well as metals and inorganic salts^{[7][8]}.

NOTE 1 PAHs are a complex group of chemicals that are comprised of two or more joined aromatic rings.

NOTE 2 Dioxins and furans are abbreviated terms commonly used to generically refer to polychlorinated and polybrominated dibenzo-p-dioxins (PCDD/PBDD) and dibenzofurans (PCDF/PBDF).

4.4.2 Fire zone

The area within the fire zone (inside a burning building, in a waste deposit, outdoor storage of biofuels, etc.) relates primarily to the actual fire and the corresponding emergency response. If people (inhabitants, workers, etc.) are at risk within the fire zone, the priority in the response shall be their health and safety. In such cases, while the environmental impacts should be a secondary consideration, they are still considered during the incident management, but with a lower priority.

4.4.3 Fire plume zone

The fire plume zone is the area over which the smoke or vapour plume from the fire disperses.

Both local topography and meteorological conditions, such as wind speed and air stability characteristics, have an influence on the characteristics of dispersion and the extent of the fire plume zone. Furthermore, the firefighting strategy also impacts the levels of pollutants in the plume: a controlled burn, for example, can reduce air pollution in some cases due to better combustion and dispersion of pollutants.

Short-term environmental impacts are most significant in this zone. Valleys, basins, high buildings and street canyons, adjacent to or surrounding the fire, constrain dispersion of the plume. Low wind speed, temperature inversion and other conditions that promote rapid plume grounding also hinder plume

dispersion. The combined effects of topographical features and meteorological conditions that lead to restricted dispersion are generally additive and result in higher air pollutant concentrations within the fire plume.

Visual impairment occurs during fires as a result of atmospheric particles, reducing visibility by scattering and absorbing light. "Urban particles", formed by gas-to-particle conversions, such as condensation of volatiles from combustion smoke, or photochemical formation of ammonium sulfate from ammonia and sulfur dioxide (SO₂), are in the size range which accumulates in the environment, persists in the atmosphere, and also scatters light effectively^[2].

Important species to consider when quantifying the environmental impact from the fire plume include large organic species such as certain aerosols, PAHs and dioxins^[3].

4.4.4 Plume deposition zone

The plume deposition zone encompasses the area under the fire plume zone. Therefore, in a similar way to the fire plume zone, the plume deposition zone is also influenced by topographical features and meteorological conditions. Most particulate deposition occurs close to the fire source.

Air temperature normally decreases with increasing altitude. Reversal of this gradation in which a layer of warmer air lies above a cooler layer is known as temperature inversion. As the cooler layer of air is denser than the warmer layer, it cannot rise, and this results in any pollutants emitted below the "warm" inversion layer becoming trapped.

Atmospheric releases also affect terrestrial and aquatic environments through deposition of pollutants. Many thermal degradation products can condense on, or be adsorbed by, the soot particles and be transported with the smoke.

There is also deposition on structures leading to corrosion, particularly from acidic decomposition products.

Health and ecological damage can arise from exposure to deposited pollutants through a variety of pathways, such as

- a) aerial deposition to water and land, and
- b) accumulation in the food-chain (e.g. flora and fauna) and subsequent consumption, either directly or indirectly, of contaminated food.

Important species in this zone include high-molecular-weight organic compounds, such as PAHs and dioxins. In order to obtain an accurate measure of the environmental impact of a particular fire, full knowledge of weather conditions is essential for the determination of deposition patterns.

4.5 Emission to the terrestrial environment

Contamination of the terrestrial environment occurs both from direct emissions from the fire and emissions prompted either by firefighting or post-fire clean-up activities, or through interaction with weather (e.g. wind and rain). When assessing the effect of a fire on the terrestrial environment, it is important to include all potential sources of contamination.

Atmospheric releases (discussed in detail in 4.4) also affect the terrestrial environment through deposition of pollutants, which can be exacerbated through the effect of weather.

4.6 Emission to water environment

4.6.1 Background

The major threat to the water environment posed by fires arises from the direct run-off of contaminated firefighting water, foam and chemical agents into rivers, streams, lakes, coastal water, groundwater

or sewage treatment works, although some threat to such water bodies is posed by the deposition of airborne pollutants directly into the water environment or via run-off from the terrestrial environment.

The impact that any discharge of fire run-off has on the water environment is dependent on a wide variety of factors, including:

- a) the volume of run-off produced, the time of travel from the site of the fire to the receptor and the dilution afforded in the receiving water body, the temperature, chemistry and type of the receiving water body;
- b) the chemical composition of the run-off, influenced to a great extent by the source of the fire, which, for example, in the case of fires at sites storing chemicals, involves a complex mix that includes
 - soot, ash and other suspended solids,
 - the decomposition products of combustion of the building, storage vessels and of substances stored on site,
 - the stored chemicals and their thermal decomposition products washed off the site by the run-off, and
 - if used as a firefighting agent, the firefighting foam,
- c) the sensitivity and the distance (time of travel from the site) of the receiving receptors, such as public drinking-water abstraction points, fisheries and valuable aquatic ecosystems.

4.6.2 Surface water

The effects of a discharge of run-off to surface water are usually short term, although often very serious, and can include the contamination of public drinking-water supplies during or immediately following the fire. The effects are usually greatest within the immediate vicinity of the site, where the levels of pollutants are at their highest.

NOTE 1 This is not always the case. For example, oxygen sags sometimes form somewhere downstream of the discharge point, as can more toxic breakdown products, e.g. ammonia from the breakdown of protein-based foams. Perhaps most important is whether sensitive receptors are found somewhere downstream of the discharge point.

As well as short-term impacts, there is also the possibility of long-term impacts arising from direct ingestion of toxic/carcinogenic/exotic organic compounds in watercourses contaminated by fire-water run-off and/or plume deposition, as well as chronic effects on flora and fauna.

One should note that it is important that run-off water does not reach water treatment plants as these can be rendered non-functional by the inclusion of large volumes of pollutants or surfactants (e.g. fire-fighting foams).

NOTE 2 Water containment issues are addressed in ISO/TR 26368.

4.6.3 Groundwater

In the case of the pollution of groundwater, the effects can sometimes last for decades and lead to long-term or permanent closure of public/commercial water supplies. The pollution of groundwater can also involve the pollution of groundwater-dependent surface water.

4.6.4 Fire-water run-off

The polluting effects of fire-water run-off, related to both surface water and groundwater, are due to one or more of the following:

- direct toxicity;
- oxygen depletion (i.e. caused by the breakdown of organic molecules in the firefighting water);

— physical, i.e. suspended solids covering the river bed, effecting the gills of fish, etc.

NOTE The New Zealand Institute of Environmental Science and Research (ESR) Limited has published a series of reports for the New Zealand Fire Service on the issue of ecotoxicity of fire-water run-off^{[10][11][12]}.

5 Adverse environmental impacts of fire effluents

5.1 Short-term impacts

Short-term environmental impacts from exposure to fires, i.e. impacts occurring after the fire over the period of a few minutes to a few days, pertain mostly to the local environment, within the fire plume zone and water run-off zone.

NOTE 1 Prediction of acute toxicity of the combination of exposure to asphyxiants and irritant gases on humans is outside the scope of this document. For more details, refer to ISO 13571^[13].

Short-term environmental impacts from exposure arising from atmospheric releases are principally associated with asphyxiant gases and irritant gases/aerosols. Most toxic releases are unlikely to be produced in sufficiently high concentrations (apart from in the local environment) so as to result in immediate incapacitation. For many of these species, toxicity only occurs through long-term exposure (see 5.2).

High concentrations of substances of acute toxicity in run-off water, draining within a local catchment area, represent worst-case impacts on natural water courses and associated aquatic habitats and species.

NOTE 2 Pollutants associated with short-term effects are discussed in ISO 26367-2.

Impacts on land, through deposition, from large fires are unlikely to result in short-term impacts.

5.2 Long-term impacts

Long-term environmental impacts from exposures to large fires, i.e. impacts occurring after the fire over a period of years, are experienced largely within the local environment, within the fire deposition zone and along impacted surface and groundwater.

Long-term environmental impacts from emissions within the local environment and within the fire deposition zone are principally associated with persistent organic pollutants and other long-lived toxicants.

NOTE Pollutants associated with long-term adverse effects on the environment are discussed in ISO 26367-2.

Long-term environmental impacts on surface waters are rare, provided there is a rapid exchange of water. Environmental impact to surface water is typically short-term.

Long-term environmental impacts on groundwater can be due to persistent organic pollutants and metals that are able to percolate into the groundwater system.

6 Intervention

6.1 Background

During the planning of a site where there is a risk of pollution from firefighting, site operators, in liaison with fire and rescue services, other stakeholders and users, need to consider ways of reducing the risk.

There are four main ways to reduce risk which can be implemented at any given site.

a) **Prevention**

By giving the highest priority to preventing the fire in the first place: for example, segregating or controlling sources of ignition such as by segregation of flammable materials.

b) **Detection**

By ensuring that, if a fire does start, it is detected and tackled as quickly as possible. The fitting of automatic detection and protection systems such as sprinklers is one way of doing this. Site operators should seek advice on such systems from the fire and rescue service and their insurers.

c) **Containment**

By installing facilities for containing firefighting water, such as storage lagoons or chambers, shut-off valves and isolation tanks or areas.

NOTE Water containment issues are addressed in ISO/TR 26368.

d) **Mitigation**

By planning with the fire and rescue service suitable firefighting strategies, such as

- reducing the amount of firefighting water generated, by using sprays instead of jets,
- recycling firefighting water where this is not hazardous, and
- controlled burning.

In cases where action is required to prevent the fire spreading, such as the application of cooling water to the area around storage tanks, care should be taken to ensure that this water does not become a pollutant.

The nature and place of any intervention that occurs have a significant effect on the environmental impact of that intervention. Some guidance is given in [Clause 7](#) as to what should be monitored when determining the environmental impact of a particular intervention and whether controlled burning, for example, could sometimes be preferable to traditional extinguishment.

6.2 Sensitivity of receptors

The sensitivity of the receiving environment/receptors for any fire effluent is highlighted as one of the factors that should be considered when assessing the environmental impact of fire effluents.

This sensitivity is generally divided into high, medium and low and depends both on the type of receptor and type of effluent. National environmental agencies can generally provide guidance concerning classification of the various receptors.

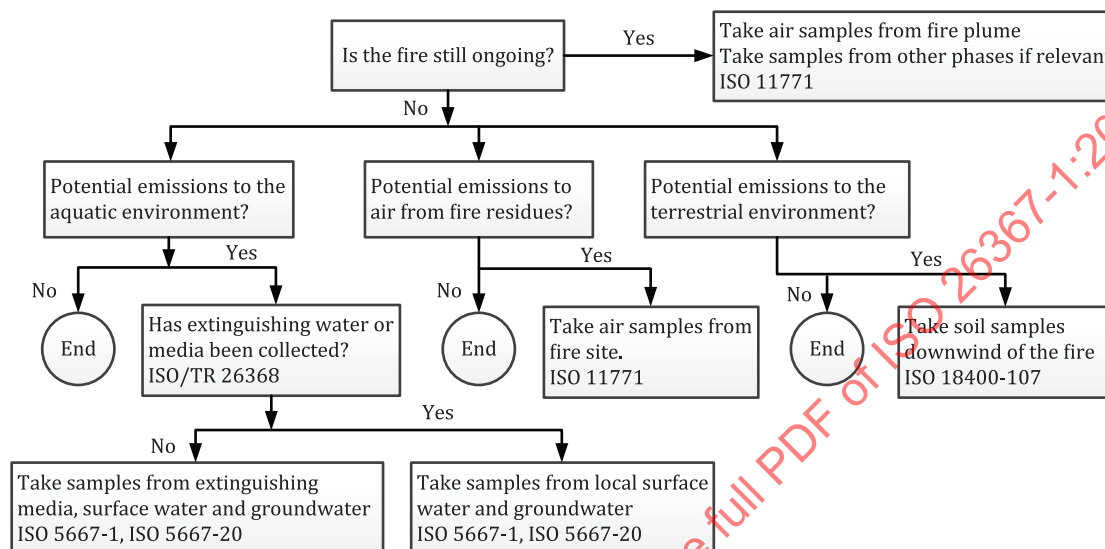
7 Assessment of environmental impact

7.1 Establishing sampling requirements

The size of the fire and the distribution or spread of fire effluents into the environment determine the need for, and location of, sampling and analysis in the post-fire assessment of the environmental impact.

The flow chart shown in [Figure 3](#) facilitates the determination of which samples should be made and which analysis of the samples is to be preferred.

NOTE 1 ISO 26367-2 provides procedures for compiling and reporting the information needed to assess environmental damage caused by a fire incident. It includes a methodology for conducting a site reconnaissance, establishing data quality objectives, designing sampling programmes, and it provides a standardised method for reporting the results of the compilation and findings of the analyses for use in contingency planning or for the assessment of the potential adverse environmental impact of a specific fire incident. A future Part 3 in the ISO 26367 series is intended to detail sampling and analysis procedures.



NOTE 2 The ISO International Standards ISO 11771^[14], ISO 18400-107^[15], ISO 5667-1^[16] and ISO 5667-20^[17] referenced in the boxes in [Figure 3](#) provide useful information about the development of sampling programmes (see also ISO 26367-2).

Figure 3 — Decision flow chart for environmental impact sampling

7.2 Sampling options

7.2.1 Emissions to the air

Sampling of emissions to the air can only be made when the fire is on-going. Sampling from the fire plume is extremely difficult. While attempted at times through airborne sampling from a variety of aircraft, it is unclear how such point samples can be related to deposition. Ground-based sampling below the plume can provide more direct input concerning potential deposition.

NOTE A variety of sampling methods are available. For more information, see ISO 19701^[18], ISO 19702^[19] and ISO 29904^[20].

Grab sampling and post-analysis in the laboratory could provide more data on the emissions of toxic and ecotoxic species, including inorganic gases, PAHs and dioxins. This data would not, however, be time-resolved.

7.2.2 Emissions to the water environment

If extinguishing media have been collected, samples should be taken for analysis.

Samples of groundwater and surrounding flowing water or lakes should also be taken.

The location and nature of sampling should be informed by the knowledge of the pathway by which run-off could be spread into the environment. A detailed post-incident analysis of pathways should be carried out to reveal all potential or actual routes to receptors.

The exact analysis of the samples should be determined on the basis of the products stored on site and their likely breakdown products, as well as on the firefighting agent used. Examples of the determinants that can be analysed for include PAHs, volatile organic compounds (VOCs), hydrocarbons, dioxins, metals, ammonia (NH₃), pH, biochemical oxygen demand (BOD), chemical oxygen demand (COD) and suspended solids (SSs). In some cases, toxicity tests and biological monitoring can also be useful.

7.2.3 Emissions to the terrestrial environment

Samples of soil in the downwind direction from the fire and in the path of the fire plume should be taken.

The exact analysis of the samples should be determined on the basis of the products stored on site and their likely breakdown products, as well as on the basis of the firefighting agent used. Examples of the determinants that can be analysed for include PAHs, dioxins, metals and pH. In some cases, toxicity tests can also be useful.

Annex A (informative)

Examples of significant fire incidents

Historically, a large number of fires have occurred which have had a significant effect on the environment. [Table 1](#) lists a representative selection of such fires to illustrate the international nature of this issue and the ubiquitous nature of the environmental effects. (See the Bibliography for more information on the specific environmental impact of each incident.)

Table A.1 — Selection of significant fire incidents with environmental impacts

Date	Place	Description
1962 to the present day	Centralia, USA	A coal mine fire has been burning continuously in Centralia since 1962, when the local population was around 1 100; all but a few people have relocated ^[21] . The fire is expected to continue to destabilize the soil in the region and emit toxic combustion gases from the burning coal for decades into the future.
November 1986	Basel, Switzerland	This famous chemical warehouse fire, in which toxic agrochemicals were released into the atmosphere and the Rhine river, killing a large portion of the wildlife downstream, initiated debate on the environmental issues of fires and served as a source of progress in the area. Ten years after, eels restocked in the Rhine river were still not consumable ^[22] .
October 1987	Nantes, France	A chemical warehouse storing inorganic fertilizers suffered a major blaze due to self-sustained decomposition of 20 tons of nitrogen-phosphorous-potassium (N-P-K) products, releasing a massive toxic plume that eventually dispersed over the ocean. Approximately 15 000 people were evacuated as a precaution. Afterwards, an experimental assessment confirmed the toxicity of the effluents in the fire plume ^[23] .
June 1987	Ohio, USA	A fire occurred in a paint warehouse located over an aquifer that supplied water to the wells in the area ^[24] . In this incident, the Dayton Fire Department chose not to extinguish the fire because uncontained water and chemical run-off would likely have contaminated the aquifer.
June 1988	Tours, France	Known as the “Protex” fire, this chemical fire spread vigorously due to the proximity of flammable and toxic products. The fire caused significant pollution of the river Loire, requiring the water supply to the city of Tours to be cut for a week ^[25] .
February 1990	Hagersville, Canada	These are two of the numerous large-scale tyre waste fires in North America. Tyre fires last several days to several months, lead to massive air, soil and water pollution, and present extreme difficulties in firefighting. Evacuation of people is required in some cases, and fresh water is sometimes disrupted for long periods. Lessons learned led to the production of useful guidelines in North America and Europe ^[26] ^[27] .
May 1990	Saint-Amable, Canada	
1991	Kuwait	As a result of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, oil wells were systematically damaged through the use of explosives, resulting in uncontrolled gas and oil blowout fires in circa 700 wells. The environmental contamination by both oil leakage and fire gases was severe, as was the long-lasting release of pollutants (equivalent to approximately 7 400 000 bbls/day) that have affected air and soil, according to a NIST evaluation report of 1994 ^[28] .
July 1992	South Bradford, UK	Significant pollution of the aquatic environment resulted from the run-off of 16 000 m ³ of contaminated water used to fight a fire in the plant of a chemical manufacturer; this fire is the UK reference in matters of pollution by contaminated water run-off in fresh water streams. The cause of the fire was the proximity of storage of incompatible chemicals ^[29] .

Table A.1 (continued)

Date	Place	Description
December 1995	Somerset West, South Africa	A massive fire of a sulfur stockpile used by three different companies in industrial applications proved that fire toxicity is a lethal threat, even in the open environment ^[30] . Over 14 000 tons of sulfur dioxide (SO ₂) were released over a 20 h period, affecting urban and agricultural areas within 30 km of the fire site.
June 2001	Venizel, France	A fire accident in a paper mill containing polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) transformers presented considerable difficulties for emergency response management and required a medical survey lasting over a year of about 100 people (including journalists) that might have been exposed to dioxins and PAHs. This case study revealed that the threat remains until the phase-out of a banned product is fully effective. An instructive report was produced on the aftermath of the fire and made public by the French authorities ^[31] .
September 2001	New York, USA	The fire and subsequent collapse of the World Trade Center released a wide range of eco-toxicants into the environment. Liou, et al. made a detailed analysis of the inorganic, organic, and morphological characteristics of three samples of debris collected a few days after the event ^[32] . Among other constituents, they found PAHs, PCBs, PCDDs/PCDFs, pesticides, phthalate esters, brominated diphenyl ethers, asbestos, heavy metals, and radionuclides. This incident demonstrated the breadth of potential exposures to people and the environment in a large-scale urban disaster involving fire.
December 2005	Buncefield, UK	A fire occurred in an oil storage depot containing 35 000 000 l of various types of fuel. The fire burned for several days, emitting massive plumes of dense smoke which, due to the prevailing meteorological conditions, were transported and dispersed in the upper atmosphere. The groundwater under and up to 2 km to the north, east and southeast of the site was contaminated with hydrocarbons and firefighting foams from the incident. After two years, the extent of the contamination appeared to be confined to the immediate vicinity of the depot. Approx. 22 000 000 l of contaminated firefighting water has been treated and safely disposed ^[33] .
1996–2009	Trail, Canada	There were at least 6 fires over the course of 14 years at a battery recycling facility, culminating in the largest fire to date in 2009. Toxic smoke was emitted, nearby residents evacuated, and the fires spread due to flaming projectiles coming from the battery storage area ^[34] . These fires raised concern about safe storage and handling of large amounts of batteries (especially lithium batteries) during the recycling process.
2011	Moerdijk, The Netherlands	A fire in a chemical plant caused the release of approximately 4 000 tons of hazardous chemicals, along with fire suppressant run-off, contaminating the air, soil and groundwater ^[35] . This incident brought issues regarding financial responsibility for remediation and public access to information about compliance of companies to safety regulations into clearer focus in The Netherlands.
2014	Morwell, Australia	An open-cut coal mine fire burned for 45 days and covered the surrounding communities with toxic smoke and ash. Elevated levels of PM _{2.5} and carbon monoxide affected residents as far as 13 km from the mine ^[36] . This fire prompted ongoing changes in Victoria's regulations to reduce the risk of fire in mining operations.
2016	Mosul area, Iraq	Oil well fires and a sulfur plant fire were started by militants advancing toward the city of Mosul. Oil pipelines were also opened, spilling oil, much of which ignited, into village streets and the Tigris river. Air pollution from the oil and sulfur fires spread across the Ninewa province, affecting people, livestock, and making the agricultural land useless ^[37] .
2016	Santiago, Chile	A large landfill fire occurred near Santiago, burning for several days. The elevated levels of particulate matter and malodorous gases affected residents of the city and surrounding areas ^[38] . Inadequate management of the fire response provoked calls to improve fire risk assessments and territorial planning for landfills in Chile.

Table A.1 (continued)

Date	Place	Description
2016	Seseña, Spain	A fire burned an illegal landfill containing as much as 90 000 tons of tires, spreading smoke throughout the region. Elevated particulate levels required evacuation of thousands of residents of Seseña. Measurements of airborne PAHs indicated that the cancer risks were 3–5 times higher in the immediate area than in other nearby areas outside the fire plume. Further measurements one year later indicated that the cancer risk had become negligible ^[39] . The landfill was declared illegal in 2003 due in part to health, fire safety and environmental concerns but plans to remove the tires were never realized; meanwhile the tires continued to accumulate, thus increasing the risk of an increasingly larger incident.

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