

Guide to Contacting Agencies About Flooding, Stormwater, and Permitting

Introduction

When dealing with flooding, stormwater regulation, and permit-related issues, maintaining clear communication with relevant agencies is essential. This guide provides best practices for contacting agencies, documenting your interactions, and ensuring that information is accurately recorded and confirmed. Proper documentation creates a record that can be invaluable for follow-up, dispute resolution, and tracking progress on local issues.

Why Documentation Matters

When you communicate with government agencies about environmental and infrastructure issues, having a clear record of conversations protects both you and the agency.

Documentation serves several important purposes:

- **Creates a permanent record** of what was discussed and agreed upon
- **Prevents misunderstandings** by confirming details in real-time
- **Establishes accountability** for follow-up actions
- **Provides evidence** for escalation if issues are not resolved
- **Helps identify patterns** across multiple contacts or agencies
- **Protects your interests** in permit and regulatory matters

Before You Call: Preparation

Gather Your Information

Before contacting an agency, organize the relevant details:

- Property address and legal description if applicable
- Site location (cross streets, nearby landmarks)
- Specific issue or concern (flooding location, permit question, stormwater problem)
- When the issue occurred or was observed
- Any relevant photos or documentation
- Previous contact information if this is a follow-up call
- Reference numbers from prior contacts or service requests

Identify the Right Agency

- **Local Floodplain Administrator or Public Works Department** – Flooding concerns, floodplain management, stormwater issues
- **County Health Department** – Illicit discharges, water quality impacts
- **City/County Building Department** – Permits, code compliance, construction approvals
- **State Environmental Agency (DNR in Missouri)** – Stormwater permits, environmental compliance, state-level water quality
- **Local Elected Officials** – When agency response is inadequate or to escalate concerns

When in doubt, contact your local City or County office and ask to be directed to the appropriate department.

Making the Call

Have Your Documentation Materials Ready

Before dialing, have the following prepared:

- A notepad or electronic document for recording information
- The date and time you are making the call
- A pen or access to a computer/phone for immediate note-taking
- A list of specific questions you want answered
- Any reference numbers from previous contacts

Stay Focused and Professional

Keep the conversation focused on the specific issue at hand. Be respectful and professional – the person answering may not be the decision-maker, and cooperation is more likely when the tone is collaborative rather than adversarial.

Ask clear, specific questions:

- "What is the timeline for addressing this issue?"
- "What steps do I need to take to file a formal complaint?"
- "Who is responsible for this particular issue?"
- "What permits or approvals are required?"

Documentation Requirements

Essential Information to Record

When you contact an agency, capture the following details in writing **during or immediately after the call**:

Information	Why It Matters
Date of Contact	Establishes timeline and sequence of events
Time of Call	Provides specific reference point for the conversation
Agency Name	Clarifies which organization you contacted
Person's Name	Identifies the specific staff member you spoke with
Person's Title/Role	Indicates their authority and expertise level
Phone Extension/Direct Line	Allows you to reach the same person for follow-up
Email Address (if obtained)	Provides alternative contact method and documentation trail
Specific Details Provided	Records what information the agency communicated
Next Steps/Actions Required	Documents what happens next and who is responsible
Reference/Ticket Number	Allows tracking within the agency's system

Table 1: Essential Documentation Elements for Agency Contacts

Create a Contact Summary Form

Use the following format (or adapt it for your needs) to document each call:

Date	_____
Time	_____
Agency	_____
Person Spoken To	_____
Person's Title	_____
Direct Phone/Extension	_____
Email	_____
Reference/Ticket Number	_____

Property Address	_____
Issue/Topic	_____

Recording Information During the Call

Document Specific Details

As the agency representative provides information, write down **specific details** about what you are being told. Examples include:

- Regulatory requirements or code sections
- Timeline or deadline information
- Required documents or application materials
- Permit numbers or reference codes
- Responsible parties for specific actions
- Contact information for follow-up
- Next steps in the process

Avoid paraphrasing in the moment. Write direct quotes when possible, or capture the essential information as accurately as you can.

The Confirmation Process: Read It Back

This is the most critical step in the documentation process:

After the representative has provided the information, pause and say: "Let me confirm what you've told me so I have it correct..."

Then **read back the key points** to the agency representative:

1. State the specific details you understood from their explanation
2. Confirm dates, deadlines, and requirements
3. Repeat the next steps and responsible parties
4. Ask them to confirm that your understanding is accurate
5. Note any corrections or clarifications they provide
6. Ask them to spell or confirm names, reference numbers, and contact information

This serves multiple purposes:

- **Catches misunderstandings immediately** – If you misheard something, the representative can correct you in real-time
- **Creates a shared record** – Both you and the agency agree on what was discussed

- **Documents accuracy** – You can note that the information was confirmed by the representative
- **Reduces liability** – If there is later a dispute about what was said, you have a record that the information was confirmed
- **Ensures clarity** – The representative knows you are taking the matter seriously

Example Confirmation Language

Representative: "You'll need to submit a stormwater management plan with your permit application, and it needs to include erosion control measures."

You (reading back): "Okay, so to clarify – I need to submit a stormwater management plan along with my permit application, and that plan must specifically address erosion control measures. Is that correct?"

Representative: "Yes, exactly. And the plan needs to be prepared by someone licensed in stormwater management."

You: "Got it – so it also needs to be prepared by a licensed stormwater professional. I have that noted. And once I submit that, what's the timeline for review?"

After the Call: Documentation

Complete Your Record

Immediately after the call ends (while details are fresh), complete your contact record with:

- Any additional notes about the conversation
- Action items you need to complete
- Follow-up deadline (if applicable)
- Name or reference number for tracking in the agency's system
- Any discrepancies or unresolved issues

Organize Your Records

Create a centralized system for storing agency contacts. This could be:

Physical System:

- A three-ring binder organized by agency or issue type
- Labeled tabs for each property or project
- Chronologically ordered contact summaries
- Supporting documents (emails, reference numbers, etc.) in corresponding folders

Digital System:

- Spreadsheet with contact dates, agencies, topics, and outcomes
- Folder structure on computer organized by property or issue

- Email account specifically for agency correspondence
- Cloud storage for accessibility and backup

Hybrid System (Recommended):

- Digital spreadsheet for easy searching and organization
- Digital folder for copies of contact summaries and emails
- Print copies of key documents for reference during future calls

Email Follow-Up

Document in Writing

After important phone calls, consider sending a follow-up email to the agency representative summarizing what was discussed:

Subject: Confirmation of [Date] Conversation – [Topic/Property Address]

Body: "This email confirms our conversation on [Date] at [Time] regarding [brief issue description]. To ensure accuracy, I want to confirm the following points:

Key

Key

Key

Please reply to confirm that this accurately reflects our discussion, or let me know if any corrections are needed."

Benefits:

- Creates a written record accepted by the other party
- Ensures the agency has accurate contact information for you
- Demonstrates your professional approach to documentation
- Provides evidence if disputes arise later

Common Agencies and Departments

Missouri-Specific Contacts

For residents in Missouri dealing with stormwater and flooding issues:

State Level:

- Missouri Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Stormwater Program – Handles state-level permits and environmental compliance
- Missouri Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) – Disaster response and flood recovery assistance
- County Health Departments – Local water quality and illicit discharge concerns

Local Level:

- City or County Public Works Department – Stormwater infrastructure and drainage
- Local Floodplain Administrator – Floodplain management, permits, substantial damage assessments
- City or County Building Department – Construction permits and code compliance
- Local Elected Officials (City Council, County Commission) – Policy issues and unresolved complaints

Request Service Reports:

Many Missouri municipalities now offer online service request systems where you can file complaints and track status. These often generate automatic reference numbers for tracking purposes.

What to Do If You're Not Getting Resolution

Document the Pattern

If your concerns are not being addressed:

- Keep detailed records of all contact attempts
- Note dates, times, and the reasons given for inaction
- Track any promises made and whether they were kept
- Identify any patterns (delays, lack of response, contradictory information)

Escalate Appropriately

1. Request to speak to a supervisor or manager at the agency
2. Contact the agency director or department head
3. File a formal complaint with the appropriate oversight body
4. Contact your local elected official (city council member, county commissioner)
5. Consider contacting state environmental agencies if state violations are involved
6. Document that you provided the agency with opportunities to resolve the issue

Keep Your Records Current

When escalating, bring your complete documentation:

- All contact summaries and reference numbers
- Chronological timeline of events
- Copies of emails and written communications
- Evidence that you followed proper procedures
- Documentation of any changes in information or positions

Tips for Effective Agency Communication

Do

- Be clear, specific, and organized in your requests
- Write things down during the call
- Read back information for confirmation
- Ask for names, titles, and direct contact information
- Request reference numbers for tracking
- Follow up in writing when important decisions are discussed
- Be professional and respectful, even if frustrated
- Keep all records in an accessible location
- Request timelines and follow up if deadlines pass
- Bring your documentation when escalating complaints

Don't

- Rely on memory – always document in writing
- Assume you understood if the representative spoke unclearly
- Skip the confirmation step to speed up the call
- Accept vague answers without asking for specifics
- Contact multiple departments with the same issue without coordination
- Get confrontational, even if the agency is unhelpful
- Discard old records – they may be needed later
- Assume an informal phone call creates a legal obligation
- Stop after one contact if the issue is important
- Share sensitive information with unsecured methods

Conclusion

Effective communication with government agencies requires preparation, attention to detail, and persistence. By following the documentation practices outlined in this guide – particularly the critical step of reading back information for confirmation – you create a clear record that protects your interests and ensures that information is accurately captured. This approach is especially important in complex matters involving permits, stormwater regulation, and flooding, where accurate understanding of requirements and timelines can directly impact outcomes.

The small investment of time in careful documentation during each call can save significant time and frustration in the long run, and may provide essential protection if issues need to be escalated or disputed.