

Understanding Odors in Marina: Frequently Asked Questions

About these FAQs

This information was prepared following the [July 6, 2026 town hall at Marina Library](#), hosted by District 4 Supervisor Wendy Root Askew and Marina Mayor Bruce Delgado.

Speakers represented the Monterey Bay Air Resources District (MBARD), Monterey County Environmental Health, the Monterey County Agricultural Commissioner's Office, the City of Marina, ReGen Monterey, Monterey One Water, and RAMCO Enterprises.

Reporting an odor

How do I report an odor in Marina?

Call the Monterey Bay Air Resources District (MBARD) at (831) 647-9411 or submit a report online at mbard.org/submit-a-complaint. Include the date, time, how long the odor lasted, and a description of what you smelled. Those details can help MBARD and the other regulatory agencies narrow down a source.

What happens after I report?

MBARD logs the complaint, assigns an inspector, and contacts you. An inspector may go out to investigate in the field, and MBARD emails other agencies and likely sources so they are aware and can respond. Depending on what is found, MBARD will handle the complaint or may refer the complaint to another agency that has jurisdiction, such as County Environmental Health for landfill and compost facilities, or the Agricultural Commissioner's Office for farm-related odors.

Can I check on the status of my complaint?

Yes. If you haven't heard from an inspector within a day or two, please call MBARD back. A supervisor or the assigned inspector will follow up with you.

Does MBARD map where complaints are coming from?

Not yet. MBARD tracks complaints by date and volume but hasn't yet created a geographic map of where the complaints are concentrated. MBARD is working on a map and will release the map when complete.

What MBARD has found

How many odor complaints has Marina received?

MBARD has received a total of 325 complaints between 2017 and 2026. Complaints tend to cluster in the winter and fall each year, with fewer in the summer months.

MBARD attributes the seasonal pattern primarily to weather: wind direction, temperature inversions, and humid conditions can trap and intensify odors.

Have investigations found a source?

Some have. For example, two field investigations in April 2026 turned up nothing: inspectors went to the reported locations, checked wind direction, and could not detect or confirm an odor at the time they arrived. That's common. Odors are transient, and by the time an inspector reaches a site, conditions may have already changed.

Two recent complaints did get traced to a source. In late November and early December 2025, MBARD received 20 complaints after roughly 48 tons of Brussels sprouts were delivered to the Keith Day compost operation in a single delivery. Cruciferous vegetables release hydrogen sulfide as they break down, which is the "rotten egg" smell residents reported. The operator diluted the material to address it, but processing that volume took place from November into February.

Separately, an agricultural wastewater holding pond became septic, generating nearly 100 complaints over a couple of weeks. Once a pond becomes anaerobic (lacking oxygen), bacteria produce hydrogen sulfide, which has a characteristic rotten egg odor. MBARD issued a notice of violation and required the operator to aerate the pond, which took time to resolve because some corrective steps (such as spraying additional chemicals) initially made the smell worse before it improved.

Why does MBARD sometimes say a source is "inconclusive"?

Several potential sources sit close together in this part of the county: the landfill, the compost facility, wastewater treatment operations, surrounding farmland where compost is applied across thousands of acres, wastewater holding ponds, and municipal water and wastewater infrastructure. That proximity, coupled with shifting wind, makes it

challenging to pin an odor to one specific source in real time. MBARD compares notes with other agencies, on-site sources and their operations at the time of the complaint to try to narrow down the odor source.

What's the legal difference between a bad smell and a violation?

An odor becomes an MBARD regulatory violation only if it comes from within MBARD's jurisdiction and meets MBARD's definition of a public nuisance. That means:

- a) It interferes with someone's enjoyment of their property
- b) It causes discomfort or a health risk
- c) At least two people report it independently
- d) MBARD confirms the nuisance was created by an identified odor source

Once a violation is documented, MBARD can issue a notice of violation, which can carry penalties of up to \$14,000 per day.

MBARD may require public agencies to reinvest a major portion of these penalties into odor-reduction technologies. Other regulatory agencies may have different penalties for odor violations.

Why is agriculture regulated differently?

Under California law, agricultural operations are largely exempt from air district and odor regulation (CA Health and Safety Code Section 41705). Monterey County also has a Right to Farm ordinance (County Ordinance 16.40.005) that protects generally recognized farming practices, including odors from applying compost or manure, and noise or early-morning activity from farm equipment. The ordinance exists to reduce conflict as housing expands closer to farmland that was there first.

That does not mean the Agricultural Commissioner's Office ignores complaints. The office has no authority to fine a grower for odor, but it does investigate, contact the grower to identify the source, and work with them on solutions where one exists.

Cannabis cultivation follows the same exemption: MBARD cannot regulate the smell or odors from a growing cannabis field but can regulate them once a grower processes the plant into oil or extract. Although MBARD does not receive funding to regulate agricultural operations, MBARD responds to cannabis and other agricultural odor complaints and may refer the complainant to another regulatory agency.

Agricultural odors are typically short-lived. Compost or manure applied before planting lasts a few days. Pesticide odors usually stay within the field treated and clear in a few

hours. Decomposing crop residue, like broccoli or Brussels sprouts left in a field after harvest, is usually tilled into the soil within a few days.

What is ReGen Monterey doing about odor?

ReGen Monterey (the public name of the Monterey Regional Waste Management District) operates both the landfill and the compost facility, each under its own Solid Waste Facility Permit issued by the County's Local Enforcement Agency. Current practices include daily soil cover on the active landfill surface, quickly burying odorous waste, capturing landfill gas, covering and promptly processing new food waste at the compost yard, using an odor-control product, and tracking wind direction before turning material.

The bigger change is underway now: an \$8.7 million project to replace traditional windrow composting, where piles are turned and exposed to air, with a Covered Aerated Static Pile (CASP) system that injects air through a pipeline instead. That cuts down on the odor and emissions that come from turning the pile. The system is funded by roughly \$4 million from ReGen and \$3 million from a CalRecycle grant, plus about \$1 million invested by compost operator Keith Day for additional features. It's expected to come online in December 2026, with a full transition away from windrow composting taking another 6 to 12 months after that.

ReGen also installed automated methane-monitoring technology across its landfill gas wells (an investment of about \$800,000), which adjusts every 15 minutes instead of the previous quarterly manual checks. It uses drone-based sensors, in partnership with UC Davis, UC Berkeley, and the state's Carbon Mapper satellite program, to detect and locate methane leaks faster.

ReGen Monterey responds promptly to odor complaints to support investigations, communicate with residents, and implement operational changes if the odor is traced to our facility.

What is Monterey One Water doing about odor?

The independent 2023 odor study (commissioned by the City of Marina, funded primarily by ReGen but authored independently to avoid a conflict of interest) found the most significant odor impacts downwind of the ReGen composting facility and Monterey One Water's sludge drying beds. Monterey One Water's response includes windbreaks, enclosed handling for food waste, source-specific controls, regular odor patrols, and a major project to improve its sludge processing.

The Solids Handling and Resource Recovery Improvements Project is currently in design and scheduled for completion in 2031. The project includes construction of an enclosed building equipped with odor control systems and new technology to de-water and dry sludge indoors. The byproduct of this process will be granules of dried material that can be hauled away from the building instead of relying on open-air evaporation. This effort complements existing infrastructure, like the utility's anaerobic digesters and food waste receiving station, that utilize closed-system processing and emission control systems to manage odors.

What about new housing near these facilities?

Marina Station is expected to add roughly 1,360 homes closer to the landfill, compost facility, wastewater treatment plant, and surrounding farmland than existing neighborhoods sit today. The City does not yet have a formal plan for disclosing odor conditions to prospective buyers. During the town hall, City of Marina staff said transparency, rather than burying it in escrow paperwork, is the direction they intend to take. That work is ongoing.

Where can I learn more?

The full July 6, 2026 town hall recording is posted on Supervisor Askew's website: <https://wendyrootaskew.com/odors-in-marina>

The 2023 SCS odor study is available on request from the City of Marina.

ReGen Monterey and Monterey One Water both offer public tours for anyone who wants to see the facilities and processes described above firsthand.

Smell something? Say something. Report odors in Marina: mbard.org/submit-a-complaint or call (831) 647-9411