

What to expect from an EPA Halon Critical Use Survey Verification Visit – a guide (2019)



This guide provides a summary of what to generally expect if your business/premises is selected for a Halon Critical Use Survey Verification Visit by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

Why and How are Halons Regulated?

- Halons are effective fire suppressants, but they are also Ozone Depleting Substances. As such, they have now been generally banned internationally under the Montreal Protocol except for specified critical uses. The main critical use remaining in Ireland relates to the use of halons as fire suppressants in aircraft.
- Regulation (EC) 1005/2009 on substances that deplete the ozone layer (the ODS Regulation) gives effect to the Montreal Protocol Restrictions in Europe.
- The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is the competent authority for the implementation and enforcement of the ODS Regulation in Ireland (S.I. No. 465 of 2011).
- Two types of halon are relevant to the Halon Critical Use Survey in Ireland; Halon 1301 and Halon 1211. The chemical name for Halon 1211 is Bromochlorodifluoromethane or BCF. The chemical name for Halon 1301 is Bromotrifluoromethane. These chemical names may often appear on halon cylinders/extinguishers/systems instead of the term “halon”.

What is the Halon Critical Use Survey?

- The EPA carries out an annual survey and prepares a report on halon critical use in Ireland for submission to the EU Commission.
- For the purpose of conducting the survey, a spreadsheet questionnaire is sent to the registered owners of equipment that contains or relies on the use of halons for their operation (or their agents if appropriate).
- The survey is completed by the registered owner (or their agent) and returned to the EPA.
- All information gathered by the EPA during this survey will be treated confidentially. Only collated data for all undertakings will be compiled into the annual National Report which must be submitted to the European Commission by 30th June each year.

What is a Halon Critical Use Verification Visit?

- The EPA carry out a number of site visits to some of the premises of halon critical users in order to verify the data submitted in their response to the survey. The primary aim of the visit is to determine whether the survey response data submitted by your company is accurate.
- Other obligations under the ODS Regulations such as the requirement to hold a licence to import halons for critical use or equipment containing halons for critical use may also be examined during visits.
- Other requirements under the Waste Management Act (1996 as amended), such as the management of waste halons, may also be examined during visits.

Why is my business/premises being inspected?

Your business/premises may be selected for one or more of the following reasons:

1. Your business/premises is likely to have equipment or systems which contain halons;
2. Previous correspondence between the EPA and you indicates that your business/premises has equipment or systems in place which use halons.
3. Your business/premises was previously visited and non-compliances were not corrected;
4. A complaint has been received about potential non-compliance at your business/premises;
5. Your survey return was considered to potentially contain inaccuracies; and,
6. Your business/premises has been randomly selected.

Who will conduct the visit?

- A verification visit may be undertaken by an authorised officer of the EPA or a contractor appointed to do so on their behalf or a combination of both.
- These visits can be carried out without prior notice under the EPA's powers. However, in many cases, inspections will be pre-notified by the EPA.

What happens during an inspection?

A visit normally consists of :

1. Opening Meeting: The EPA will ask general questions relating to the nature of your business which will help determine which parts of the Regulations apply and in order to determine appropriate avenues. Examples of questions which may be asked include:
 - Review the inventory of aircraft, including changes from calendar year to year. Note that this inventory is in effect Section 10 of the Halon Critical Use Survey form. If this inventory has not already been prepared or is incomplete, the inspection will take longer as the EPA will collect information on all equipment from site personnel present during the visit.
 - Are all necessary documents available for inspections?
2. Site tour: Following the opening meeting, the EPA will carry out a tour of the site if appropriate, for the purpose of:
 - Comparing the details on the inventory with the equipment observed (depending on the size of the premises and the extent of systems on site, the EPA may decide to only visit certain parts of the site);
 - Verifying compliance with equipment labelling requirements;
 - Observing, where relevant, on-site practices with regard to storage of cylinders of gases and checking whether any prohibited gases are stored; and,
 - Examining records.
3. Documentation review: The EPA will inspect documentation relating to the equipment/systems which contain halons. The documentation which the EPA may inspect if relevant includes:
 - Maintenance and service records provided by the maintenance/service contractor;
 - Invoices;
 - Customs documentation;
 - Proof of qualifications for the technicians who service and maintain the halon containing equipment; and,
 - Documentation relating to the management of waste gases recovered during the maintenance, servicing or decommissioning of aircraft.
4. Closing meeting:
 - During the closing meeting, the EPA will briefly outline the findings of the inspection to the operator. Where non-compliances are found, or there are outstanding issues which could not be confirmed during the site inspection, these will be outlined to the operator.

What should I do to prepare for the inspection?

In preparation for an inspection, where it has been pre-notified, you should:

- Have an appropriate person available to deal with the EPA who understands what halon systems are, knows how your survey response data was compiled and has access to the necessary documentation and/or personnel. This is one of the most important aspects of preparing for the inspection;
- Provide a space in which the opening and closing meetings as well as the documentation review can be conducted, if possible; and,
- Gather together any records relating to the equipment. This would include maintenance and service records (ideally, have records available for the survey calendar year), copies of technician qualifications provided by your contractor and any inventory of equipment/systems.

The EPA carries out unannounced inspections from time to time. Therefore, all operators should ensure that the required records are maintained and that any staff member can make them available to the EPA in the event of an unannounced inspection.

How long does an inspection take?

This will vary depending on the type and size of the business/premises being inspected but would typically be between 3 and 4 hours.

What happens after a visit?

- Some information may not have been available during the visit. If so, please forward any requested documentation as required.

- The EPA will issue a halon critical use verification report as soon as possible after the completion of the visit. If a non-compliance has been detected, a Notice of Non-Compliance will also be issued. Both the visit report and any Notice of Non-Compliance issued will list any corrective actions required to bring your company into compliance. Other observations may also be listed. A deadline may be set for response to the EPA.
- The EPA's Enforcement and Compliance Policy sets out the EPA's approach to enforcement and compliance.

Further Information:

Further information is available on the EPA website at www.ozone.ie.

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