

Press release: Water company fined for pollution incidents

Northumbrian Water Ltd (NWL) has been ordered to pay over £33,600 in fines and costs for three separate pollution incidents, including pollution of a Tyne Valley burn with untreated sewage effluent, which bypassed the local sewage treatment works.

The company was sentenced on Monday 23 July at South Tyneside Magistrates' Court after admitting one charge of causing a discharge of untreated sewage into Smithy Burn at Broomley on 19 August 2016.

Two other similar offences were taken into consideration as part of this case following unpermitted discharges of sewage effluent on 26 June 2015 at both Summerhouse & Killerby Sewage Treatment Works (STW), both near Darlington.

The pollution at Broomley originated from a storm overflow channel. These allow rainwater and sewage effluent to bypass a sewage treatment works in times of heavy rainfall, to avoid the works' capacity being exceeded. To be lawful, storm overflows should be incorporated into the works' environmental permit.

According to the Environment Agency, this was not the case at Broomley, since Northumbrian Water's environmental permit clearly states that discharges to Smithy Burn should consist only of treated sewage effluent.

Silt build-up

Chris Bunting, prosecuting for the Environment Agency, told the court that investigations found a build-up of silt had prevented flow from reaching the works, and instead diverted it to the storm overflow. Northumbrian Water's maintenance inspections hadn't included a requirement to check a manhole chamber where the blockage would likely have been discovered.

Formal samples were taken from the burn and an ecological survey revealed a thick sewage fungus affecting the watercourse for 100m downstream of the outfall, which had starved the water of oxygen and resulted in the death of freshwater shrimp and midge larvae.

At Summerhouse & Killerby STW's, the Environment Agency's inspections found both to be in a poor state of repair with faulty equipment. Rather than discharging treated sewage effluent, at Killerby sampling showed effluent leaving the works was more polluted than where it arrived.

Malcolm Galloway, appearing for NWL told the court that staff were to blame for the faults as they hadn't followed the company's inspection procedures, and that NWL has a good compliance record. He also maintained that the storm overflow at Broomley had been permitted because it was included in the permit application made back in 1989.

In sentencing, District Judge Roger Elsey ruled that the company's culpability was low, but that the additional offences meant the fine had to be increased.

Environment Agency Area Environment Manager, Fiona Morris said:

The incident at Broomley had a significant impact on the ecology of Smithy Burn. This case demonstrates how important it is that water companies and wider regulated industries understand and comply with the conditions by which they are permitted to operate.

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[News story: Next steps towards a fully inclusive transport network](#)

- new measures will help to make transport fully accessible for all passengers by 2030
- up to £300 million made available for improvements to the network
- part of a government drive to build a society that works for all

New measures, backed by hundreds of million pounds, will help ensure all disabled people can travel confidently and easily.

The Department for Transport has today (25 July 2018) set out its [Inclusive Transport Strategy](#), which will improve accessibility across all types of travel for those with both visible and less visible disabilities.

The strategy includes investment in rail accessibility infrastructure, commitments to produce league tables which highlight operators that are

delivering the best service for disabled people, and funding for Changing Places accessible toilets at motorway service stations.

The government will put up to £300 million of funding into extending the Access for All programme, making railway stations more accessible, including through step-free access.

Transport Accessibility Minister Nusrat Ghani said:

Transport is at the heart of how we live our lives. It helps us get to work, stay in touch with friends and family, and access vital services like healthcare and education.

But for our ageing population and the fifth of people who are disabled, access to transport can be far from straightforward.

This Inclusive Transport Strategy is the first step in achieving a genuinely inclusive transport network, which meets the needs of all people, regardless of whether they are disabled or not.

Government acknowledges there is a lot of work to do to make the transport system fully accessible by 2030. The physical infrastructure that will be required to achieve this will take time to build. However, we are committed to working at pace on those areas where we can make an immediate and important difference, such as training and assistance.

Other measures announced today include supporting the Rail Delivery Group (RDG) to improve and simplify Passenger Assist – the system disabled passengers use to book assistance on the rail network.

Train operators will be held to account for delivering on this service, ensuring they compensate passengers if the booked assistance is not provided.

Other measures announced today include:

- £2 million to install Changing Places toilets at motorway service stations, supporting disabled people to travel easily and comfortably on the road network
- £2 million for audio and visual equipment on buses, so that passengers on almost every bus will know where and when to alight
- a £2 million passenger awareness campaign to increase disability awareness and reduce hate crime on our network
- an accreditation scheme for transport operators to receive formal recognition for positive work to improve disabled passengers' experiences, such as training frontline staff and senior management on disability awareness
- ensuring future technology is designed inclusively from the outset, with opportunities sought to harness innovation

This work comes ahead of the government's Aviation Strategy, which will set

out further measures to improve the airport and flying experience for disabled people.

This could include working with industry to provide better staff training, offering improved on-board facilities and exploring possible changes to aircraft design.

Keith Richards, Chair of the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee, said:

DPTAC welcomes the publication of the ITS and the government's commitments to better meeting the needs of disabled people. Our role, as independent statutory advisor, is to offer our advice as the ITS is delivered. As a 'critical friend' we will hold the government to account for delivering the strategy and for securing good outcomes for disabled people.

It follows an announcement in May, when the Prime Minister [said she wanted people to enjoy an extra 5 years of healthy and independent living by 2035](#), while also narrowing the gap between the richest and poorest.

Central to making this a reality will be supporting people to remain active and connected to their families and communities – and transport has a significant role to play.

Nic Bungay, Director of Campaigns, Care and Information at Muscular Dystrophy UK, said:

Muscular Dystrophy UK welcomes the Department for Transport's plans to make public transport more accessible for everyone and is encouraged to see investment in this area. Our campaigners have worked hard over the years to push for improvements and, while we know there is still a long way to go until people with disabilities have full accessibility, this announcement shows we are heading in the right direction.

As the co-chairs of the Changing Places Consortium, we are also pleased that funding has been committed to installing these fully accessible facilities at motorway service stations across the country, and we look forward to working with DfT as these are put in place.

Mark Lever, Chief Executive at the National Autistic Society, said:

The strategy launched today is a step forward, particularly the passenger awareness campaign and accreditation scheme for transport providers. We now need to make sure these measures aimed at all disabled people, fully reflect the experiences and needs of

autistic people and their families.

We and our supporters have been calling for the government to listen to autistic people and make sure public transport is accessible for all.

There are around 700,000 autistic people in the UK who rely on trains and buses to go to school, work and to visit family. But many autistic people can feel so anxious about getting on public transport that they are unable to leave the house at all. It's not just the worry about potential delays, cancellations and large crowds. It's also the tuts and stares from other passengers who see someone acting differently, but don't recognise that it's because they're autistic.

At the National Autistic Society, we won't accept a world where autistic people are shut away. Increasing understanding of autism among transport staff and the wider public has to be at the heart of what needs to change. Today's announcement has the potential to help create a public transport system that works for autistic people.

Mark Atkinson, Chief Executive at disability charity Scope, said:

It's positive to see this commitment from the government. There is a lot of work to do to bring our transport system up to scratch.

Disabled people face unnecessary difficulties using all parts of the transport network every day.

Scope's research shows forty percent of disabled people experience problems using trains. From airports to buses we've heard too many horror stories of disabled people let down by poor infrastructure, bad service, or being treated as an afterthought. This urgently needs to change.

A genuinely inclusive transport network will make it much easier for disabled people to get to work, see family, and be part of their community.

The Inclusive Transport Strategy also includes raising awareness and enforcement of passengers' rights, staff training and improvements to accessible information. This will support the Future of Mobility Grand challenge, at the heart of which is a transport system that works for everyone.

It follows the [Accessibility Action Plan consultation](#) which received over 1,000 responses.

Speech: Commence renewed and meaningful peace negotiations

Thank you Mr President and thank you to Special Coordinator Mladenov for your briefing and for your recent work with Egypt to secure a renewed ceasefire between Israel and Hamas. It is essential that the ceasefire is respected and maintained by all sides. The people of Israel and Gaza deserve peace and security.

The escalation seen at the Gaza perimeter last Friday, including the killing of an Israel Defense Force soldier, is deeply concerning. Hamas must cease all acts of violence and terror and decide whether it is prepared to demonstrate its commitment to achieving peace and ending this conflict.

The most recent escalation and exchange of rockets into southern Israel, and the economic and kinetic response by the Israelis, are also both concerning.

We urge the parties to take immediate steps to reverse the current negative trends on the ground, and to commence renewed and meaningful peace negotiations.

Mr President, now more than ever, we urgently need a political process that delivers a two-state solution. As Council Members, we must seize the opportunity presented by the prospect of a US plan. The UK stands ready to support and contribute to all credible efforts to restart the peace process; we urge others to do the same.

The UK position on the peace process is unchanged; we support a negotiated settlement leading to a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state, with Jerusalem as a shared capital.

Mr President, every Israeli and Palestinian has the right to live in peace and security. No one wants to see a return to conflict, which will inevitably have devastating consequences. We call on the parties to take the following urgent action to avoid escalating the conflict:

First, Hamas must bring an immediate and permanent end to rocket fire and the sending of incendiary devices into Israel.

Second, Israel must reverse its punitive measures and work with the international community to ease conditions in Gaza, including opening movement and access and reducing economic restrictions.

Third, the Palestinian Authority must resume salary payments and work to restore its presence in Gaza.

The international community also has responsibilities, including the need to

rally around Special Coordinator Mladenov's plans to improve the situation in Gaza and in supporting Egyptian efforts on political reconciliation and longer-term arrangements for calm in Gaza.

The risk of tensions boiling over into a full-blown conflict are very real and very dangerous. Every effort must be made to avoid civilian casualties.

Nobody around this table wants to see another Gaza conflict. At such a highly sensitive time, we urge calm and restraint.

We appreciate Egyptian efforts in calming tensions and we urge Egypt to do more by improving movement and access through Rafah crossing.

Mr President, we are also deeply concerned by continued demolition of Palestinian property by the Israeli authorities. Due to severe planning restrictions, many Palestinians have no option but to build without permission. This needs to change. Demolitions and evictions of Palestinians from their homes causes unnecessary suffering to ordinary Palestinians and, in all but the most exceptional of cases, are contrary to International Humanitarian Law.

The village of Khan al-Ahmar is a case in point, and this is an example that has also been raised this morning by the French and Dutch Ambassadors. We continue to urge Israel to abandon demolition plans entirely, and instead provide a transparent route to construction for Palestinians in Area C. Not only could demolition constitute forcible transfer, it would also pave the way for settlement building in E1. In accordance with our longstanding policy, we would have to condemn such a move. Such action would strike a major blow to the prospects for a two-state solution and make it difficult to believe that Israel wants progress towards peace.

Finally, Mr President, I want to reiterate that the UK remains firmly committed to supporting UNRWA and Palestinian refugees across the Middle East. The UK welcomes the important contributions that Member States are providing to UNRWA.

However, UNRWA's deficit remains at \$217 million, meaning it will shortly have to make a decision about whether to open schools in September. The increased demand for UNRWA's services and growing instability across the region make UNRWA's support even more important. It is clear that UNRWA needs a broader pool of financial support from donors to achieve sufficient, assured and predictable financing. It is also clear that UNRWA needs to continue to promote realistic and technical cost-saving reforms.

The UK continues to support UNRWA and remains one of the top five donors. We have delivered our pledge of \$37.5 million and have brought forward \$13.5 million to help meet the urgent needs of Palestinian refugees. We encourage members of this Council to consider what more they can do to support Palestinian refugees and alleviate the current financial pressure facing UNRWA.

Thank you.

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