

Press release: Managing hazardous materials advice for Astonfields businesses

The advice and guidance Environment Agency staff gave to businesses on the Astonfields Industrial Estate, Stafford, will ensure that local businesses manage their hazardous waste and materials to help prevent pollution in the future.

In this unannounced day of action, more than 50 businesses were visited and inspected by Environment Agency staff. The inspections checked a number of things, including how hazardous materials are stored, how they are disposed of, whether the site and its drains are maintained and if businesses know what to do if something did spill into surface water drains.

James Perry, from the Environment Agency's Hazardous Waste Team, explains why it's important to reduce the risk of pollution:

Hazardous materials used in industrial processes can be washed into the surface water drains by rain. These drains usually flow directly into a brook or a river which means hazardous materials can pollute the water, causing a problem for fish and other aquatic life. In serious cases, a pollution can also affect other businesses who use the water for their industrial processes or even affect drinking water.

By offering advice and guidance on measures businesses can take to reduce the risk of pollution, we're seeking to make sure the owners have robust processes in place to prevent a pollution and know what to do if something goes wrong. This is really important; at the Environment Agency we follow the 'polluter pays principle', so if something does happen, the company responsible will have to pay the costs of clean up and recovery.

The Marston Brook flows near the industrial estate and has suffered from low levels of pollution from materials washed into it from surface water drains for a number of years. It is hoped this day of action will reduce the level of pollution seen in the Marston Brook.

If anyone is concerned about the business practices at any site, or if there is a pollution in a river or brook, please contact the Environment Agency's 24/7 incident hotline on 0800 80 70 60.

Press release: Strategic Review of Charges Consultation Launched

The Environment Agency is launching a public consultation today (Thursday 30th November) on the cost of its permits and business charges. Regulating business costs the taxpayer money, but under proposals laid out in the Strategic Review of Charges, the burden on the public purse would be significantly reduced. The proposed changes will mean that businesses pay for the full services they use rather than the public – a more financially-sustainable model that will lead to long-term environmental improvements.

This the biggest review of charges that the Environment Agency has ever carried out, and has involved a 12 month period of engagement with businesses and trade associations. There have been very limited changes to business charges since 2011, with costs kept below inflation (CPI).

The proposals are for a simpler and more consistent charging arrangement. Our charges will reflect the amount of regulatory effort needed at a site. Businesses that are well-managed and low-hazard present a low environmental risk and would be charged less. Higher-risk or poor-performing businesses would be charged more.

If the new charges are implemented, the Environment Agency will also be able to invest more in our permitting service. This is vital to improve the standards of certain sectors, such as waste and nuclear industries.

Neil Davies, Environment Agency Director of Regulated Services, said:

Our work to regulate industry protects and enhances the environment. The proposed changes will mean that businesses pay for the full services they use rather than the public. This is more financially-sustainable, will lead to a better service to businesses and long-term improvements to the environment.

We have been engaging with trade associations over the last year while we were developing these proposals. Their input into this process has been really valuable and I urge them to take part in the consultation.

The consultation will run until 12 January 2018, with the proposed charges being introduced in April 2018 – the start of the financial year. To have your say: click [here](#).

News story: Cabinet Office issues an Invitation to Tender for a fraud prevention and detection managed service

This week the Cabinet Office issued the Invitation to Tender for the procurement of a service delivering all aspects of the National Fraud Initiative (NFI). The NFI is the Cabinet Office's electronic data matching exercise that compares data within and between public and private sector bodies to prevent and detect fraud. The NFI has been successful in helping the public sector identify and stop fraud in their systems.

In this past year the NFI has already helped identify £100.6 million in savings across England bringing the total across the UK since 1996 to £1.63 billion.

The contract will cover data matching and IT services for the period 2018 to 2022, with the potential to extend to 2024.

The successful supplier will need to provide a robust system that meets government security standards and that can reflect any future changes to data protection legislation, such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Minister for the Constitution, Chris Skidmore, said:

The UK government is committed to finding fraud in public services, wherever it is and I am delighted that we are procuring such an essential service, which has found and prevented over £1.6 billion of fraud over the past 11 years.

We want the new supplier to be a real collaborative partner and together we will jointly drive innovation and continual development in what is a fast moving area.

We want to develop enhanced data matching/analytics techniques, build greater functionality for the NFI web application and access key data more frequently.

The tender is expected to be awarded in March 2018.

For more information on how to apply please [visit Tenders Electronic Daily](#).

News story: New employment programme begins in England and Wales

The government's new Work and Health Programme to help disabled people into employment started this week in north west England and Wales.

The entire programme is expected to provide specialised support to around 245,000 people with disabilities or health conditions, and also people who have been unemployed for over 2 years.

Participants will get personal support to help them find sustained employment. The support may include:

- identification of employment needs
- matching skills to work that's available
- putting participants in touch with employers
- managing health problems to reduce their impact on work

Five providers across 6 regions in England and Wales will deliver Work and Health Programme. The programme will roll out across the rest of England during early 2018.

Around £100 million of funding has been devolved to London and Greater Manchester to procure and deliver localised versions of the programme from 2018 to capitalise on the local knowledge, good practice and expertise of these areas. Participation on the programme will be voluntary for disabled people and specified early entry groups.

The Work and Health Programme forms part of a wider package of employment support for people with disabilities, as outlined in the government's [Work, Health and Disability Green Paper: Improving Lives](#), published in October 2016. Next steps following on from the Green Paper will be outlined in due course.

Press release: Jim Harra appointed as Second Permanent Secretary at HMRC

Today Sir Jeremy Heywood announced that Jim Harra, currently Tax Assurance Commissioner and Director General Customer for Strategy and Tax Design, has been appointed as the new Second Permanent Secretary at HMRC.

Welcoming the appointment, Sir Jeremy Heywood said:

I am pleased to announce the appointment of Jim Harra as Second Permanent Secretary at HMRC. He has done an excellent job in his dual roles of Tax Assurance Commissioner and Director General for Customer Strategy and Tax Design in HMRC. He brings with him a wealth of relevant experience and I look forward to working with him as he takes up his new role.

I would also like to thank Edward Troup for his tremendous public service over the last 13 years as he stands down next month from his role as Chair of HMRC.

Jon Thompson, Permanent Secretary at HMRC, said:

I am delighted that Jim has taken up this post in HMRC. There are some enormous and important challenges ahead for HMRC: our transformation programme to make us a world class, digital-first tax authority; our focus on supporting the honest majority and clamping down on the dishonest minority; and our work to rise to the challenges of exiting the EU – particularly on customs and the border.

Jim knows HMRC and its customers well and will bring his usual dedication, knowledge and professionalism to the role. I look forward to working with him to tackle these challenges.

Jim Harra said:

I very much look forward to becoming HMRC's new Second Permanent Secretary. The work we are doing in the department, to create a tax system that makes it easier for taxpayers to get things right, and to prepare for the UK leaving the EU, is vitally important and touches every life in the country. I am proud to have been given the opportunity to help lead this important work.

This appointment has been formally ratified by the Prime Minister, and is the result of a recruitment exercise across Whitehall.

1. Jim Harra has held a dual role of Tax Assurance Commissioner and Director General Customer Strategy and Tax Design in HMRC.
2. The Second Permanent Secretary role was created following Edward Troup's announcement of his retirement at the end of this year. Jim Harra's appointment means that HMRC continues to have a tax professional as one of its two Permanent Secretaries.
3. Arrangements for appointing a successor to fill Jim Harra's previous

role will be announced in due course.