

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.

[Press release: Playground ready for summer fun at Forge Mill Farm](#)

Updated: Wrong image used in original article

Ongoing construction of phase 2 of the Environment Agency Perry Barr and Witton Flood Risk Management Scheme, meant that the children's play area at Forge Mill Farm, had to be closed whilst the wall was being built. In addition to the play area being ready for the start of school holidays, contractors have now moved access to their construction site, away from the main visitor car park, to ensure safety of visitors to the park.

Rachel Kelly, Environment Agency project lead for the scheme said:

We have been working closely with our partners and the local community, to ensure that we minimise disruption to the park users and safety is of our top priority, especially as the summer holiday season begins and more people come to enjoy the park.

A number of notice boards are now on display around Forge Mill Farm, the lake and RSPB, to give visitors the latest information on progress of Phase 2 of the Perry Barr and Witton Flood Risk Management Scheme, which will reduce the risk of flooding for 1400 properties in the area.

More information is available about the scheme on the [Perry Barr and Witton flood scheme page](#) or [contact the Environment Agency project team](#).

Along with flood defences and flood management schemes, knowing your flood risk is also important when protecting your family and property from flooding. People can check their risk and register to receive free flood warnings by visiting the [Environment Agency flood information pages](#) or

calling Floodline on 0345 988 1188.

[Press release: Environment Agency responds to impacts of dry weather](#)

The Environment Agency has stepped up its incident response to tackle the impacts of continued dry weather, following the driest June since 1925.

Record-breaking temperatures and very low rainfall throughout May, June and much of July is taking its toll on the environment, with wildlife suffering as river levels drop. EA teams have responded to 44 significant environmental incidents since the end of June including moorland fires, algal blooms, dry boreholes, low river flows and fish rescues.

The National Drought Group (NDG), chaired by Sir James Bevan, Chief Executive of the Environment Agency convened today (Monday 23 July) to discuss the operational approach to managing water supplies and review preparation for the pressures ahead.

The group is made up of 30 organisations including water companies, regulators and environmental groups. During the meeting, water companies explained how they were implementing activity set out in their drought plans and increasing efforts to reduce leakage.

NDG members set out how they had stepped up activity on all fronts and urged everyone to reduce water use and wastage to conserve supplies and protect the environment.

See the NDG's full position statement [GOV.UK](#)

Sir James Bevan, Chief Executive Environment Agency said:

The water that comes from the tap is taken from our rivers and reservoirs and the amount we use has a direct effect on people and the environment around us.

As we prepare for drought in the North West and dry weather continues around the country, we have stepped up our response to minimise wastage and tackle the impacts of low river flows on wildlife.

We all have a part to play to protect this precious resource. I expect water companies to step up their efforts to ensure supplies are well-managed and people at home should use water wisely.

The lack of rain has led to a rapid decline in reservoir levels in the North West. The EA is preparing for drought in the region and United Utilities have announced a hosepipe ban affecting 7 million people from early August. The company have applied for 2 drought permits and 1 drought order across Cumbria, which the EA are now considering. The company is preparing a further 3 drought permits to be submitted before the end of July.

Dry weather is also affecting a number of sectors, notably agriculture with concerns about water supplies needed for irrigation and potentially lower yields. The EA is meeting with affected groups to provide practical advice about conserving water and planning for drought, should the dry weather continue.

Further action the EA is taking includes:

- Frequent river monitoring and 50% increase in incident response for this time of year – mostly associated with extreme hot weather and prolonged dry conditions.
- Working closely with water companies to ensure they are following drought plans and implementing actions in a timely way.
- Robust regulation including increasing the number of inspections for businesses abstracting water to ensure compliance with licences.
- Operating strategic water transfers to help maintain river flows.
- Moving staff to affected areas to deal with increasing demand for incident response and regulatory work.
- Leading by example – from late July, not cleaning EA fleet vehicles or office windows to avoid unnecessary water usage.

Around the country, water companies have enough water to maintain supplies if resources are managed properly and if the public use water wisely but a dry end to the summer and dry autumn could see the risk of restrictions and further environmental impacts spread across the country.

Reducing the amount of water we use helps protect the environment and conserves supplies during extended periods of dry weather. There are a number of ways the public can use water wisely including:

- Avoid using sprinklers, use hosepipes sparingly and don't water your lawn – it will recover quickly when rain returns
- Ditch the paddling pool and head to the beach – [find your nearest bathing water](#)
- Water plants after 9pm – the water is less likely to evaporate
- Fit a water butt, so when the rain comes you'll have stored water for your garden
- Take a shorter shower
- Turn off the tap when brushing your teeth
- Always put full loads in your washing machine and dishwasher

You can find more water saving tips at [waterwise](#)

News story: National Drought Group – Chairman's statement

The National Drought Group (NDG), chaired by the Environment Agency's Chief Executive, brings together government departments, water companies, environmental groups and others to coordinate action to maintain water supplies and manage the other risks associated with drought. The NDG convened today (Monday 23 July) to assess the present situation and coordinate plans for the weeks ahead.

The present situation and the prospects

We are in a continuing period of prolonged hot and dry weather. June 2018 was the driest June since 1925, with a rainfall total for England of only 15 mm.

One water company, United Utilities, has announced its intention to impose a hosepipe ban ("Temporary Use Ban") in parts of the North West from 5 August. The other water companies do not currently intend to introduce hosepipe bans, and there is no threat to essential public water supplies. But continued dry weather into autumn could see the risk of some further restrictions and further environmental impacts across the country.

Action we are taking

The water companies, the Environment Agency and others are taking action to reduce the risk of further water restrictions and to ensure that water users and the environment itself continue to get the water they need. Participants agreed to step up their activity on all fronts.

Water companies

The water companies are stepping up action to sustain a reliable water supply to their customers. They:

- Have put additional resources in place to do so.
- Are implementing their contingency drought plans as appropriate.
- Are actively advising customers on water efficiency and offering free water saving devices.
- Are stepping up their efforts to find and fix leaks to protect supplies and help reduce the risk of further hosepipe bans
- Are taking a range of other steps to sustain supply, including water trading between companies and additional measures to keep farmers and other customers supplied with a particular focus on vulnerable customers.

The Environment Agency is:

- Actively monitoring the weather, water situation and the environment,

analysing the prospects and sharing its analysis with others.

- Working with the water companies to ensure they are following their drought plans and implementing actions in a timely way.
- Working with businesses, farmers and others who abstract water under licence from the EA to manage down demand and protect the environment, using its regulatory powers as necessary.
- Stepping up engagement to encourage the public and others to cut down on non-essential water use.
- Operating water transfers such as the Shropshire Groundwater Scheme to help maintain river flows for water supply and the environment.
- Stepping up its incident response to ensure the environment is protected – responding to 50% more hot weather incidents, including fish kills.
- Moving its operations to higher alert status and increasing staff resources to support its own work and those of partners in affected areas.
- Leading by example: EA fleet vehicles and office windows will not be cleaned to avoid unnecessary water usage.

Other partners

- The National Farmers Union (NFU) and farmers are working closely with the EA, Internal Drainage Boards, water companies and Defra to manage the situation and sustain farming production, including through water trading and abstraction restrictions that are now in place in some catchments.
- The Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) have produced top tips for farmers on coping with drought and heat.
- The Canal and Rivers Trust (CRT) are closing some navigations to save water, providing information to boat users on the situation and asking them to consider sharing locks where possible – as they always do in summer.
- The Angling Trust have distributed guidance to their members on fishery management during hot and dry weather. Anglers can report any fish in distress to the Environment Agency hotline on 0800 80 70 60.
- Other partners are taking action to preserve water supplies, sustain economic and leisure activity and protect as far as possible the environment, rivers, lakes and wildlife.

Advice to the public

Please use water wisely. Prolonged dry weather and localised drought is not unusual. Water companies plan for periods of exceptionally low rainfall. There is enough water for all if water resources are managed properly. All of us can play a role. We encourage everyone to follow the advice of their water company and use water wisely. This will help protect the environment and the economy, and reduce the risk of further water restrictions.

Enhanced coordination and next NDG meeting

The NDG agreed to step up coordination between its members to maintain a common assessment of the situation and ensure the closest possible cooperation to address the current challenges; and agreed to meet again on 29

August.

[Press release: Environmental permits issued for Holmwood drilling site](#)

The Environment Agency has issued environmental permits to the company to provide a high level of protection to the environment during its operations at the Holmwood site in Dorking, Surrey.

Before issuing the permits the Environment Agency carried out a detailed assessment of the application and considered all legal requirements, along with all comments received through two rounds of public consultation. The environmental permits issued set out the stringent conditions the site operator must comply with to ensure that the environment and local people are protected.

Europa Oil & Gas Limited will need to have all relevant permissions in place from other regulatory partners before it can start operations on site.

An Environment Agency spokesperson said:

We would like to thank everyone who responded to the public consultations. We have carefully considered all of the information received and are confident, in issuing these permits, that we have the right controls in place to ensure operations are carried out safely.

The Environment Agency plays a key role in protecting the environment. We take an evidence based approach to regulation and had to be satisfied that the necessary protections were in place before we would allow exploration to begin. We are confident that the legally binding conditions in the permits and our compliance checks will ensure that operations meet the highest standards.

We do understand the concerns that a large number of people have raised and we are committed to keeping local people informed of our work to regulate the site.

[View the oil and gas mining waste permit issued for Holmwood Wellsite, Surrey.](#)

Notes to editors

The permits authorise Europa Oil & Gas Limited to:

- drill a new oil well at Holmwood
- store oil on-site
- manage any radioactive waste arising from these activities (a separate permit has been issued in this respect)

There is further information on how the Environment Agency determines applications, the time scales involved and how it regulates onshore oil and gas:

- [Environmental permitting: public participation statement](#)
- [Onshore oil and gas exploration and extraction: environmental permits](#)
- [Onshore oil and gas regulation – information page](#)

And information on radioactive waste permits:

- [Radioactive substances for non-nuclear sites](#)