

# Press release: School visits to talk water safety

The visits to schools around Marston-on-Dove, followed a number of reports over recent weeks of children playing on weirs, which are often used by the Environment Agency to monitor river flows.

During the talks schoolchildren heard about the dangers of the water around weirs, some of which are not always obvious, including strong underwater currents and sudden changes in water depth. They were also given information about how they could avoid these risks by taking note of warning signs, not walking or climbing on weirs and avoiding swimming near weirs, locks, bridges or other structures on rivers.

Emma Smailes, Operations Manager from the Environment Agency said:

We know that children love to explore the outdoors, especially during summer holidays, and we want to help them remain safe whilst doing so. That is why we felt it was important to talk to the children directly to remind them of the potential dangers when playing near structures in rivers.

We would also encourage parents and guardians to speak to their children, teenagers and young adults to warn them about the dangers and basic safety points when out having fun.

David Walker, Leisure Safety Manager from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents said:

At this time of year it's especially important for parents to have a conversation with their family about the risks of open water, particularly in the areas where it's prevalent.

Many of the risks aren't obvious, such as weirs, and the effects of cold water shock. It's important to think about this in advance so that if, on the rare occasion, you see someone in trouble or get into trouble yourself, you know what to do.

If you want to go for an outdoor swim, it's always best to go to supervised sites such as lidos. Programmes such as the Swim Safe scheme give children the experience of swimming in open water, teaching them about how to stay safe in a controlled environment

More information about water safety is available from [The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents](#)

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## **Press release: Illegal waste operation carried out at Harwich**

Environment Agency officers from teams across England have conducted an intelligence-gathering operation at Harwich International Port in Essex focussed on the illegal export of waste.

The aim of the operation was to stop and check HGVs carrying waste in a bid to identify any waste materials which could have been being illegally exported to Europe.

Around 30 loads were stopped on the day, with paperwork checked and waste loads examined. Officers were seeking intelligence about waste that could potentially be illegal heading to the continent and assessing the supporting documents.

Field intelligence officers, port officers and members of the illegal waste shipments team were on hand to speak with drivers passing through the port, offering advice and support on transporting waste abroad legally.

The team on site made use of the Environment Agency's Incident Command Unit, enabling them to receive emailed paperwork from waste contractors when it was found to be missing.

Twenty-nine trailers were inspected in total, and 18 were found to be carrying waste. In each instance the paperwork was examined and in 9 cases there were missing or incomplete documents. These were eventually all completed with the support of Environment Agency officers and the vehicles were allowed to continue their journeys.

Chris Smith, National Intelligence Manager, whose team led the operation for the Environment Agency, said:

The sheer volume of material that we found today and prevented from being exported illegally is a big win, but our work isn't finished. Today's action sends a strong message that we will track down those involved in illegal waste activity. We intend to continue our inspections of waste at ports around all of England to ensure waste being exported is done so legally.

The effects of exporting waste illegally is harmful to the environment and the economy. It undercuts legitimate businesses and causes harm to human health and the environment in destination

countries.

Waste crime is a serious issue diverting as much as £1 billion per annum from legitimate business and the Treasury. Since April 2011 the Environment Agency has invested £65.2 million in tackling it.

Anyone with information about suspected illegal waste operators should call Crimestoppers in confidence on 0800 555 111.

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## **Press release: Environment Agency's efforts see Norfolk's eel population boosted**

Increased numbers of eels have been observed at a Norwich fish pass, as well as sightings further upstream on the River Tud, the first to be found in that location for nearly 40 years.

Jez Wood, a specialist at the Environment Agency, said:

Last month 2 small eels were found on a routine fish survey on the Tud, a tributary of the Wensum.

Two doesn't sound like many, but these are the only small eels we've found on this stretch for years, and only the fifth and sixth of this size found in the Wensum catchment since 1973.

Whilst this does not herald the recovery of the species as a whole, it does show the positive benefit of eel passes at barriers to migration and the monitoring programme at the Environment Agency.

The global eel population has dropped dramatically over the past 40 years, with numbers down by as much as 95%. Whilst there are thought to be many reasons for this decline, barriers to upstream migration are one that we can do something about.

These barriers reduce access to freshwater habitat in which many eels prefer to live while they mature, before migrating back across the Atlantic to the Sargasso Sea where they spawn and die.

In Norfolk barriers include tidal sluices, weirs and mills. Eel passes are helping the Environment Agency ensure the population can be restored and stabilised.

The status of the European eel is still regarded as “critical” and the Environment Agency is creating passes at several key obstruction locations on Norfolk Rivers, such as New Mills Yard, in Norwich.

Eel numbers are monitored by the Environment Agency at various tidal structures and also in fish monitoring surveys on the rivers. Since the New Mills pass was installed in 2009, the number of eels have ranged from the hundreds to a record 34,000 in 2016.

These are not new eels fresh from the Sargasso, but older eels which have spent time in the Broads for maybe 2 or 3 years before attempting to migrate upstream.

Whilst it's not known why the numbers of eels fluctuate so greatly, the general increase in numbers and the findings upstream are positive signs for the health of our rivers.

## **Factfile: Lifecycle of eels**

Much is still unknown about the lifecycle of the European eel.

It is catadromous, which means it spends most of its time in freshwater but returns to sea to breed.

The larval stage of the eel, called Leptocephala, migrate across the Atlantic drifting on the Gulf Stream before metamorphosing into the glass eel stage 7 centimetres when they enter continental waters around September.

They reach the estuaries in the UK from October/November in the South West and spread over the rest of Britain over the next few months, though don't tend to actively migrate upstream until the spring.

Glass eels start passing tidal structures in April and through the summer and gradually become pigmented elvers.

The urge to migrate upstream is not consistent – not all glass eels migrate past the tidal barriers in the first year. Some elvers stay in the estuary never entering the rivers, some stay in the estuary and enter the river in subsequent years.

Those that do enter the rivers can migrate upstream for several years, moving during the warmer months so the downstream reaches tend to be dominated by younger age-classes whilst upstream areas can contain only old/large individuals, predominately female.

Growth rates vary, but females reach between 45 and 85cm 10 to 12 years post-metamorphosis and males between 30 and 45cm 6 to 10 years post-metamorphosis.

At this point physical changes occur, and they change from yellow eels to silver eels and they start the downstream migration in late summer and autumn and return to the Sargasso where it is believed that they spawn and die, though this behaviour has never been witnessed.

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## Press release: Fines issued after waste illegally used for flood defence

A waste company, 1 of its directors and a tenant farmer involved in the illegal deposit of waste on protected land in an Essex village have been ordered to pay a total of £19,430.

Chelmsford Magistrates' Court heard that 3,920 tonnes of inert waste was deposited on land at Little Hayes Farm, Stow Maries, breaching a waste exemption. The work was also carried out without a flood defence consent or permission from Natural England. The area is within an environmentally sensitive area which benefits from protection as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), a Special Protection Area, a Special Area of Conservation and RAMSAR site.

Chelmsford Magistrates' Court heard that the site did not comply with the U1 exemption which only allows 1,000 tonnes of soil and stones to be used for construction purposes. Almost 4 times this amount was deposited onto the land between 15 April and 8 May 2015, before the activity was stopped by Natural England and the Environment Agency.

On Thursday 3 August, 2017 Simon Hollington pleaded guilty to knowingly causing the illegal deposit. T J Cottis Transport Limited and Jedd Cottis (a director of the company) both pleaded guilty to depositing the waste without an environmental permit and failing to comply with duty of care requirements.

Mrs Miriam Tordoff, prosecuting for the Environment Agency, told the court the waste was deposited there in an attempt to strengthen the existing flood defence at this location. The material used was construction and demolition waste from development sites and T J Cottis Transport Ltd.'s own permitted waste treatment facility. The waste consisted of mainly soil and stones but also included concrete, brick, plastic, glass, wood and plasterboard. It was not suitable for the construction of flood defences.

Mr Hollington employed T J Cottis to deliver waste to land at Little Hayes Farm, Stow Maries. The company paid Mr Hollington £4,800 to deposit the waste. The company accepted that they saved £24,000 in landfill charges by depositing the waste on Mr Hollington's land.

Mrs Tordoff explained that following the Environment Agency's request to remove the waste Mr Hollington had now applied for an environmental permit to do this. The waste is expected to be removed later this year.

After the hearing Environment Agency enforcement team leader Lesley Robertson said:

This case highlights to landowners that risk taking is not acceptable, whether it is a risk that concerns human health or the environment. Owning a piece of land means accepting a responsibility to the surrounding area and all that resides there, be it business, homes or wildlife.

If you want to operate under a waste exemption you must register that exemption with the Environment Agency. Each registration lasts 3 years and will then expire unless you re-register. Each exemption has specific limits and conditions you need to operate within. If you don't, you will not be exempt from needing a permit and may face enforcement action.

Registering an exemption does not remove the need to apply for other permits or permissions. For example, you may need planning permission for your waste operation. You can find out more on the GOV.UK website at environmental permits.

This prosecution follows extensive work with Natural England.

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