

Press release: Couple ordered to pay over £62,000 for River Leadon pollution

The Bennions of Rosehill Farm, Dymock, were each fined £5,500 and each ordered to pay £25,798 in costs along with a victim surcharge of £170.

More than 15,200 fish were killed as a result of the incident in which hundreds of tonnes of digestate were discharged into the river. Fish killed including brown trout, chub, eel, dace, roach, lamprey, and bream. The Bennions are the sole partners of the partnership that own and run Rose Hill Farm.

The incident, on the 22 July 2016, occurred when an employee was instructed by Mark Bennion to fertilise one of the orchards. The employee turned on the irrigation system designed to take the digestate fertiliser from a lagoon to the orchard.

However, he had not physically checked and therefore did not know that the valve linked to the standpipe in another field was partly open. As a result, when the fertiliser entered the irrigation system, it discharged out of the standpipe, across the field and into the Preston Brook.

The discharge pump operates at 100 tonnes an hour, therefore a very large amount of polluting digestate entered the watercourse. The discharge was the worst in 10 years in the area.

Mark Bennion liaised with Environment Agency officers and submitted a proposal for dredging the brook in order to remove all contaminants. This was completed on 12 August 2016.

Surveys conducted after the incident show the fish population within the watercourse have been significantly adversely impacted. The Leadon is an important habitat for eels and a significant number of adults were lost as a result of the pollution.

In passing sentence, the Magistrates sought to achieve a balance between the major adverse impact on the watercourse and the powerful mitigation put forward on the defendants' behalf. The Bennions were both previously of good character, with no previous convictions, and co-operated with the Environment Agency immediately after the incident. Their remorse was evident throughout the investigation and court hearing.

Since the incident the Environment Agency have restocked the river with more than 15,000 fish. The restocking process will continue over the next 4 years.

Speaking after the case an Environment Agency spokesperson said:

Agriculture uses 70% of the land in England and farmers have a

major impact on the environment. Most farmers act responsibly and we work with the industry to respond to incidents, tackle the root causes of pollution and promote good practice.

But where farmers are responsible for serious pollution incidents, we will not hesitate to take enforcement action, including prosecution. Agriculture is the single biggest source of serious pollution incidents and all farmers have a duty to prevent it.

This was one of the worst pollution incidents on a watercourse in the Herefordshire and Gloucestershire area in the last 10 years. It significantly affected a stretch of the River Leadon catchment.

We are pleased that the court has accepted the seriousness of the case and imposed appropriate penalties.

We appreciate reports from the public to the Environment Agency's Incident Hotline on 0800 80 70 60 which allows our staff to respond swiftly to protect people, wildlife and the environment – and also to investigate environmental offences which may have occurred.

Press release: First joint exercise with the fire service in the south west to test flood defence barriers

Environment Agency field operatives will roll out up to 120 metres of temporary defence barriers, in partnership with Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service officers. This will be the first joint exercise of its kind in the south west, although the fire service has previously helped deploy barriers during live incidents.

The exercise will take place at the Ashley Road recreation ground, next to the River Avon, from 10am to 1pm. Teams will deploy 3 types of barriers and seepage pumps to practise their joint response to flooding.

Robbie Williams, Environment Agency Operations Manager for the Wessex Area, said:

We are investing to reduce flood risk in Salisbury as part of a £2.5 billion investment nationally to better protect 300,000 homes by 2021.

Salisbury is at risk from flooding from 5 rivers running into the city and their close proximity to homes and businesses, so it's

important we limit the overall impact and extent of flooding, and keep people safe.

Joint exercises like this will help us be better prepared for any future incidents as we'll be able to deploy the barriers more quickly and efficiently when flooding is expected, helping to protect communities and the local economy.

Jason Moncrieff, Station Manager for Salisbury, Wilton and Amesbury, said:

Across our area, Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service has a number of communities at high risk of flooding. It is great to have this opportunity to work closely with Environment Agency colleagues, both to test how we can support them when flooding is expected, but also to better understand how they work and the defences they have available.

The exercise site is 1 of 4 areas in the city where temporary defence barriers would be deployed in a real life river flooding incident.

These measures are supported by the Salisbury Operating Flood Working Group, which launched a multi-agency flood plan outlining the city's emergency response last year. Volunteer wardens were also recruited by Salisbury City Council to act as the eyes and ears of the community for any flood risks.

Partner agencies and some schools have been invited to observe the exercise, including Wiltshire Council, Salisbury City Council, Wiltshire Police and wider members of the Wiltshire and Swindon Local Resilience Forum.

One of the Environment Agency's new Incident Command Vehicles will also be on site recording footage of the exercise. The WiFi-enabled vehicle acts as a mobile incident room and a temporary headquarters for staff out in the field, enabling better site management, situational awareness and visibility in flood risk communities.

Local residents will be informed about the exercise in advance and invited to stop by to find out more. Ashley Road and the formal footpath around the edge of the recreation ground will still be accessible to users.

Residents can sign up to receive flood alerts by phone, email or text message. Residents can [register online](#) or by calling the 24-hour Floodline on 0345 988 1188.

Notes to editors

There are 3 types of barriers. The Innero and Geodesign barriers are aluminium frames which expand into shape before being lined with plastic sheet to create a waterproof wall, with the Floodstop barrier being a plastic structure linked together for more specific deployments.

Three teams of 8 people (6 Environment Agency, 2 fire service) will rotate on the hour between each barrier type, overseen by site controllers.

The Salisbury Operational Flood Working Group members are Salisbury City Council, Wiltshire Council, the Environment Agency, Salisbury Cathedral, Salisbury BID (Business Improvement District) and Highways England.

Media opportunity

The media are invited to attend the exercise at 11am on Tuesday 5 December and carry out a brief tour of the site and carry out photo/filming/interview opportunities with approved spokespeople from the Environment Agency and Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service. Please confirm your attendance with the Environment Agency press office by emailing communications_wessex@environment-agency.gov.uk.

On arrival the media should report to the information stand on site, to be signed in and given high visibility jackets for safety and identification purposes. Press officers will assist with this process. Please note, the Environment Agency cannot accept any liability if health and safety procedures are not followed.

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Press release: Flood barrier drop-ins for residents

Residents in two north east communities are urged to attend drop-in events to find out how temporary barriers will help protect them from flooding.

The Environment Agency has been working with partners at Gateshead Council and Northumberland County Council to develop flood barrier deployment plans for Dunston and North Blyth.

The two communities have been identified as locations where temporary barriers could reduce the risk of flooding to properties when high tides are expected.

In Dunston, the barriers will be used along Railway Street between Team Street and Staithes Road.

At North Blyth the barriers will be used along the bottom of Worsdell Street, Dale Street and Gray Street.

The Environment Agency is inviting local residents from Dunston and North Blyth to attend community drop-in events to find out more about how the temporary barriers will be used, and to provide residents with the opportunity to speak to staff. Plans will also be available to show where the

barriers will be deployed if needed.

The drop-in events take place on:

- Wednesday 29 November, between 4pm and 7.30pm at North Blyth Bar and Social Club.
- Tuesday 5 December, between 4.30pm and 7.30pm at Dunston Community Centre, Collingwood Terrace, Gateshead, NE11 9EB.

The barriers have previously been used successfully at both Newcastle Quayside and elsewhere in Blyth during January's tidal surge.

They are a series of one-metre high, lightweight metal barriers which are clipped together and then covered in tarpaulin, before being weighed down by metal chains and sandbags.

David Clark, from the Environment Agency's Flood and Coastal Risk Management team in the north east, said:

We know the devastating impact flooding has on homes and businesses and are continually looking for ways to protect our communities.

We've already used the temporary barriers in real-time during this year's tidal surge and we are well practised at their deployment to help reduce the impact of the flood.

We've been working hard to develop deployment plans for new locations which will benefit from a temporary barrier deployment and I'd encourage residents at both Dunston and North Blyth to come along and find out more about how it will work in their community.

While we can never completely eliminate the risk of flooding these temporary barriers are another weapon in our armoury.

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