

Press release: Water quality returns to 'safe' following Heanor chemical spill

Tests carried out by the Environment Agency on the water quality of numerous ponds in Shipley Country Park have revealed the water has now returned to a safe drinking water quality and signs to stay out of the 2 affected ponds have now been removed.

Drinking water quality does not mean it is recommended to drink the pond water; it means the concentrations of cyanide currently monitored are below these standards.

Environment Agency officers have continued to investigate and monitor the impact on the local environment of an accidental spillage of around 400 litres of liquid cyanide from a lorry delivering to an industrial unit in Heanor on Tuesday 6 February, some of which leaked into the nearby Adam's Pond.

Since the incident occurred, the Environment Agency has been regularly collecting samples from numerous ponds on the site and sharing the results with Derbyshire County Council, which owns the park, and Public Health England. The results have determined what actions were required to minimise the impact of the contaminants in the watercourse and ponds.

Greg Oakes, Area Duty Manager at the Environment Agency, said:

Samples have regularly been taken to monitor the cyanide levels in the water and the results of the latest samples show the water is now at a drinking water quality, which is an excellent result. However, we would stress, drinking water standards does not mean we would recommend drinking the pond water, it is just that the concentrations of cyanide currently monitored are below these standards.

Our officers have been working to minimise the effects of the spillage on the environment and wildlife in the area. The contamination was largely contained to Adam's Pond, which unfortunately resulted in a number of dead fish being found in the pond but, due to the level of contamination, our staff were unable to enter the water to carry out a netting activity to capture them. Whilst our monitoring showed there was some discharge to the nearby Osbourne's pond, this did not result in any dead fish being found there.

We placed bags of activated carbon downstream of Osbourne's pond to help filter cyanide out of the water and prevent it from leaking

down the watercourse into the further ponds but the best course of action, minimising risk to people and the environment, was to wait for it to break down naturally.

In light of the latest results, rather than continuing with monitoring on site, we will now put a recovery plan in place. Adam's Pond is still closed to fishing to allow the water life to recover and the Environment Agency will meet with the county council and the local fishing club next month to discuss a management plan for the pond.

We will also be investigating the source of the pollution and take appropriate action against those found to be responsible.

A report by the Environment Agency's National Centre for Environmental Toxicology confirmed there was no significant risk to other wildlife which may have eaten dead fish from Adam's Pond.

Shipley Country Park has remained open and safe to use following the chemical spillage incident but visitors to the park were advised by Derbyshire County Council not to enter the water or let their dogs enter the water in Adam's Pond and Osborne's Pond.

Councillor Simon Spencer, Derbyshire County Council's Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Infrastructure, said:

Shipley is a much-loved park and the damage caused to Adam's Pond is extremely distressing. But we're relieved that there appears to have been no damage to Osborne's Pond and pleased that the water in both ponds has now returned to safe drinking water quality.

This must not be allowed to happen again and we're pleased there will be an investigation and action taken against those responsible to send a clear message to businesses that they need to take their environmental responsibilities seriously.

The Environment Agency plans to visit businesses on the industrial estate next to the park to identify any potential pollution risks. We're grateful for any help and advice they can give about measures businesses can put in place to prevent further incidents like this happening at the park in the future.

Environment Agency staff work 24/7 to protect people and wildlife from pollution incidents. If you see pollution in your local river or watercourse, please call their incident hotline on 0800 80 70 60.