

Press release: Thames Water to pay £80,000 after sewer blunder

A pollution incident in south-east London has left Thames Water handing over 10s of thousands of pounds to an environmental charity.

After the company allowed sewage to escape from a blocked sewer in 2013, Thames Water will give £80,000 to the South East Rivers Trust to make improvements to a local river. It will also pay the Environment Agency's full costs for the investigation of almost £20,000.

In October 2013, an underground sewer pipe in Chislehurst became lodged with tree roots, fat, oil, grease and other debris. The build-up forced sewage above ground, flooding a field and two streams, before entering the River Shuttle.

Officers from the Environment Agency believe the sewage, which killed as many as 20 stickleback fish and hundreds of invertebrates, could have been flowing for several days. The effect of the pollution on water quality and river habitats was seen over several miles.

Jamie Lloyd, a land and water officer for the Environment Agency in south-east London, said:

A lack of maintenance by Thames Water over an extended period of time was to blame for this incident.

Tree roots were allowed to grow into the sewer unchecked, resulting in fat and sewage solids causing a complete blockage. Sewage backed-up and was sent with some force through two manholes, triggering significant pollution. Thames Water compounded the pollution by failing to clear the sewer quickly after the Environment Agency reported the incident to them.

Following the Environment Agency's investigation, Thames Water installed equipment to monitor sewage levels in its sewer network, near to where the blockage occurred. This will tell them about any developing problems, and allow obstructions to be cleared as soon as possible. The company has also relined the sewer to help prevent roots entering the pipes again.

Thames Water will make the £80,000 payment as a civil sanction, also known as an enforcement undertaking. Companies and individuals can make good some of the environmental damage they cause, including through a financial contribution to a local project. The Environment Agency must also be satisfied the polluter will make changes to its operations to prevent similar damage in the future.

The South East Rivers Trust, which helps communities look after rivers, will

use the money to install a fish pass on the River Cray at Bexley, allowing various types of fish to swim upstream, beyond an historic weir at Hall Place, to the upper reaches of the river.

While agreeing to enforcement undertakings, the Environment Agency continues to prosecute organisations and individuals where evidence shows high levels of culpability and serious environmental harm.

Thames Water has paid the Environment Agency's costs of £18,814.51 for the case.

The Environment Agency urges anyone who spots what they think is pollution to call its free, 24-hour incident hotline: 0800 80 70 60. Officers respond to limit damage to the environment, protecting people and wildlife.

[Press release: Solicitor General refers Croydon 'zombie knife' attacker's case to Court of Appeal](#)



The Solicitor General, Robert Buckland QC MP, has referred Joshua Gardner's original sentence to the Court of Appeal under the Unduly Lenient Sentence Scheme.

Gardner, 18, was sentenced earlier this year in a high-profile case which saw the teen receive a suspended sentence for attempted grievous bodily harm with intent. He was arrested after he wielded a large knife on a busy Croydon street and attempted to use it to break into the victim's car and attack him.

He was sentenced at the Central Criminal Court in November this year, where he was given 2 years imprisonment suspended for 2 years, as well as an unpaid work requirement, curfew order, and a rehabilitation activity.

The appeal hearing will take place on 30 January. The Court may decide to keep the sentence the same, increase it, or issue guidance for future cases.

Speaking about the case, the Solicitor General said:

After carefully considering of the details of this case, I decided to refer the sentence to the Court of Appeal due to the serious nature of the offence concerned.

Gardner took to the streets in broad daylight, terrorising his victim and those members of the public who witnessed this extreme act of violence with a dangerous weapon.

It is now for the Court to decide whether to increase the sentence.

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Last updated 22 January 2019 [+ show all updates](#)

1. 22 January 2019 Court date has now been published
2. 20 December 2018 First published.

[News story: National Drought Group – EA Chairman’s Statement – January 2019](#)

The National Drought Group (NDG) brings together government departments, water companies, environmental groups and others. The role of the group is to prepare for and mitigate the impacts of dry weather, to coordinate action to maintain water supplies, consider water users and protect the environment.

The National Drought Group (NDG) met on Monday 21 January, chaired by Harvey Bradshaw, Executive Director at the Environment Agency, to assess the water resource situation and actions being taken to reduce risk for summer 2019.

CURRENT SITUATION AND PROSPECTS

Wet weather in November and December [2018](#) brought a welcome end to six consecutive months of below average rainfall in England. This winter refill started slightly later than usual but the rain brought relief for many parts of England, with the exception of eastern England.

Despite this improvement and a slightly improved water resources situation compared to this time last year, the picture in England is not yet back to normal.

January has been dry, with just 4% of the expected (long-term average) rainfall in the first 15 days of the month, resulting in most rivers flows being very low for the time of year. There are still several reservoirs below normal in central England, groundwater in aquifers stretching from Oxford to

Cambridge have also not recovered. The [Met Office 3 month outlook](#) shows a slightly higher chance of drier weather than wet during January – March. If the coming months are dry, water available for spray irrigation by farmers may be limited during the summer. If the dry weather continues it will potentially have a significant impact on wetlands and the wildlife they support including returning migratory birds due to an inadequate mix of habitats e.g. mudflat, wet grassland, open water.

The Environment Agency (EA) is taking the following action:

- Moving megalitres of water around, for example since April we have moved 27510 million litres of water in our Ely Ouse to Essex transfer and during January we plan to move a total of 7965 million litres.
- Close monitoring to assess the conditions of rivers affected by sustained low flows and prepare for potential environmental incidents.
- Supporting farmers by updating our position on flexible abstraction for farmers – due to be published in coming weeks – which will include extending the refill season into April for winter storage reservoirs.
- Reviewing guidance for water company drought plans and incorporating lessons learnt over last summer.
- Working flexibly with environmental NGOs and site managers to optimise management of wetland sites to ensure there is enough water on site or providing advice on possible other sources of water

The National Drought Group discussed opportunities to work collaboratively on these actions, the possible implications of further dry weather and how issues from EU Exit may impact on water resources for later in the year.

THE WATER SECTOR

Extreme weather in 2018 – the ‘Beast from the East’ and summer heatwave – put pressure on the sector to test their resilience and drought plans. Following a request at the last NDG meeting, Water UK has reported on the actions the water sector has taken to protect water supplies and reduce longer term drought risk: [Managing water supplies in 2018 and preparing for 2019](#). The Environment Agency and Defra welcomed this activity and clarity.

Most water companies are in a better position than at the start of 2018 but several companies still have reservoirs and/or groundwater below average levels. The companies reassured the NDG they are taking necessary actions such as changing how they operate their sources of water, spending more on tackling leakage, promoting water efficiency and offering additional services to customers such as Southern Water’s free water pipe lagging and Thames Water’s home visits.

Water companies set out specific activities including:

- Yorkshire Water drought permits to give extra flexibility to ensure the company is prepared for the summer.
- Severn Trent Water is considering a drought permit and have been active with their customer communications.
- Anglian Water is working with the EA and the National Farmers Union

(NFU) to identify opportunities to share water in the summer.

- United Utilities is embedding learning from the dry weather in 2018 into its operations.

Last year the Environment Agency issued 6 drought permits, reviewing each application to ensure the environment was not put at risk. During the meeting Defra and the Environment Agency urged water companies to act early in making any future applications as a fair assessment of the water needs of people, industry, farmers and the environment takes time – and also because teams are working to prepare for EU Exit.

AGRICULTURE

The National Farmers Union (NFU) has updated members on the dry start to the year and possible risks for the summer. Their main focus has been the East of England as the region has not shown strong signs of recovery yet. The Environment Agency's flexible approach to abstraction for farmers will be updated shortly to include extending the refill season into April for winter storage reservoirs.

The NFU and Environment Agency have run 'abstraction clinics' with farmers in Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire and will be arranging more in the Midlands and other parts of East Anglia during January and February. Advice will also be sent to farmers, updated online and available from the Environment Agency customer contact centre enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk on 03708 506 506.

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The NDG cautiously welcomed the recovery of water resources in many parts of England but acknowledged the ongoing dry weather may put pressure on farmers and the environment in the spring.

Water companies were positive that even if the dry weather continues over the coming months, they would not need to introduce any restrictions this summer. Water companies reassured the group that they are not being complacent – they continue to tackle leakage, review their operations and communicate with customers.

In the short to medium term, farmers and the environment face the biggest risks and those involved need to take action now to prepare for what could be a difficult summer.

Through the NDG, members will need to work together to act early and mitigate these risks, the potential challenges from a cold snap and the changes from EU Exit. We encourage sharing and trading of water as a number of members did in 2018.

The NDG will meet again in March 2019.

[News story: Remote health monitoring of people in custody: apply for funding](#)

Systems able to detect the condition of people in custody are necessary for ensuring the safety of both individuals within custody suites and the healthcare professionals tasked with monitoring them.

Working with Innovate UK, [Police Scotland](#) has up to £150,000 to invest in projects that can remotely monitor individuals and provide an early warning and intervention alert system, improving custody health and welfare outcomes.

Funding is provided by the [CAN DO Innovation Challenge Fund](#) and is under the Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI) programme.

Multiple people at different locations

This competition is looking to develop systems that can view and monitor the health of multiple people at different locations.

This should include:

- allowing healthcare professionals to carry out remote consultations and monitor a subject's heart rate, temperature, breathing and movement
- determining the clinical risk of potential internal concealment of foreign bodies. These include drugs, weapons, phones and cigarettes

Projects must be able to look at remote monitoring without using wearable devices and be transferable to any custody suite in Scotland.

A 2-phase competition

The competition will run in 2 phases.

The first phase will award research and development contracts to organisations to demonstrate the technical feasibility of their idea. A total of £150,000 including VAT is allocated to this phase.

More money could be made available to successful phase 1 applicants in a second phase. Up to 2 projects could get up to £200,000 each including VAT to develop a prototype and undertake field testing.

Competition information

- the competition opens on 28 January 2019, and registration will close at midday 20 March 2019
- it is open to organisations of any size
- phase 1 project costs are expected to be up to £30,000 and to last up to

6 months

- successful applicants must be vetted to [Non-Police Personnel Vetting standards](#) at level 2
 - there will be [a briefing event on 4 March 2019 in Kincardine](#) where organisations can find out more about the competition and applying
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[Press release: Violent Birmingham carjackers jailed for longer](#)

A gang of carjackers have had their sentences increased after the Solicitor General, Robert Buckland QC MP, referred their case to the Court of Appeal.

Sarweeth Rehman, Hussun Ashraf and Adal Azam, all 22, carried out a string of thefts in which vehicles were towed away using a pick-up truck.

Their offending escalated when they attempted to steal 2 cars by smashing a car window with a hammer while the driver was still inside, and threatening another driver with a metal bar.

Rehman and Ashraf were further convicted of offences which took place on 24 August 2017, when Rehman threatened a man and smashed up his car. Later that same day Rehman and Ashraf dragged a woman from her car before stealing it. Further incidents occurred over the following months.

Rehman, Ashraf and Azam were originally sentenced in October at Birmingham Crown Court. Rehman was sentenced to 5 years and 9 months in prison, Ashraf to 6 years 4 months in prison, and Azam to 3 years and 10 months in prison.

The Court of Appeal has today increased Rehman's sentence to 10 years in prison plus activation of 2 suspended sentences amounting to 34 weeks imprisonment to be served consecutively, Ashraf's to 11 and a half years in prison plus activation of one suspended sentence of 16 weeks imprisonment to be served consecutively, and Azam's to 6 years in prison.

Speaking after the hearing, the Solicitor General said:

These men carried out a series of violent attacks, striking when the victims were alone and then making off with their cars. The Court's decision to increase their sentences now reflects the severity of their crimes.