

Press release: Charity payment after water company permit breach

The Environment Agency has accepted an Enforcement Undertaking which will see Northumbrian Water pay £375,000 to charities in the North East after it breached environmental permitting regulations.

The offer also includes actions for Northumbrian Water to improve its operations and infrastructure.

It follows a sewage pollution incident involving West Wylam pumping station, investigated by the Environment Agency on 18 February 2015.

A blockage upstream of the pumping station resulted in raw sewage overflowing into Park Burn, a tributary of the River Tyne, breaching its permit.

Investigations showed significant water quality impact at Park Burn, with sewage odour and litter visible, and ammonia and suspended solid levels above accepted levels. Surveys indicated there had been no significant impact on the invertebrate population in the burn, and there was no impact on the Tyne, due to the river size and flow of the river.

Northumbrian Water carried out an immediate clean-up of the polluted area after it was reported to them.

Wide range of measures

The Environment Agency is making better use of the wide range of measures that are available to bring sites back into compliance as quickly as possible. Along with prosecutions, it uses enforcement notices, stop notices and civil sanctions to either improve performance or stop sites from operating.

The Environment Agency's use of civil sanctions is in line with recent legislation extending their availability for more offences.

Civil sanctions such as these can be a proportionate and cost-effective way for businesses to make amends for less serious environmental offences. The company must offer to restore or remediate the harm caused by the incident, and demonstrate they will change their behaviour and ensure future compliance with legislation.

Proportionate response

Fiona Morris, Environment Manager with the Environment Agency in the North East, said:

We will always take forward prosecutions in the most serious cases and while we did initially consider prosecution, the company

submitted an EU which we subsequently accepted.

We felt it to be a more proportionate response that would benefit the environment – achieving more than if the company had been convicted and fined.

We work hard to protect people and the environment, and a clear regulatory framework with agreed standards and targets has helped to drive major environmental improvements over the last few decades.

We're continuing to improve our approach to ensure that we remain a fair and proportionate regulator.

The actions offered in the accepted EU, require Northumbrian Water to:

- Make donations to Tyne Rivers Trust (£134,500), Northumberland Rivers Trust (£59,500), Wear Rivers Trust (£48,500), Tees Rivers Trust (£58,500).
- Make a donation of £74,000 to Groundwork towards the Land of Oak and Iron Project.
- Make improvements to site operations and infrastructure, including updated sewerage records, an updated process for asset planning and management and refurbishment of West Wylam pumping station, as well as an accelerated programme of planned upgrades to sewer infrastructure in the area.
- Further inspections and surveys of the impacted area.
- Pay Environment Agency costs.

Failure to comply with an EU may result in the offender being prosecuted for the original offence.

[See the full list of the most recent enforcement undertakings](#)

News story: Work to improve disabled access to toilets on trains and at stations is underway

Work to improve disabled access to toilets on trains and at stations is underway following talks between Rail Minister Paul Maynard and senior rail industry representatives.

The Rail Minister met with senior executives after Paralympian Anne Wafula Strike highlighted the issue. Clearer information will be made available

about the availability of accessible toilets in advance of journeys and the Department for Transport will work with train companies to see how staff training can be improved. Where facilities are out of order, we have challenged industry to make sure disabled passengers are informed before the train departs. Maintenance teams will also ensure accessible toilets are more reliable and fix them more quickly when problems arise, ensuring fewer toilets are out of service in the first place.

Rail Minister Paul Maynard said:

I take the issue of accessibility on our railways extremely seriously and these commitments from industry are just one step forward to improve things.

It is vital that all people, including disabled passengers, are able use public transport and I will continue to push train companies on this matter.

Paul Plummer, chief executive of the Rail Delivery Group (RDG), which represents train operators and Network Rail, said:

The rail industry wants to modernise what is often Victorian infrastructure to make it more accessible and to provide far better information to enable people with disabilities to travel with confidence.

When things go wrong, rail companies want to put them right, and we are keen to hear directly from people with disabilities to understand their experiences which is why the industry is already engaging more with disability groups to understand how we can improve.

It has been a requirement since 1999 that all new trains with toilets are built with accessible toilets as standard – all trains built before then must comply by 2020.

The meeting sought to identify and address the reasons behind the lack of provision of accessible toilets, as part of the government's ongoing commitment to reduce barriers to disabled people accessing transport services. The steps were agreed as part of the rail industry's continued strong engagement with disabled advocacy groups.

More than 150 stations have been upgraded under the [Access for All programme](#) to remove barriers to independent travel – this includes installing signs, ramps and lifts. A further 68 are in construction or development.

The Department for Transport will be publish its 'Accessibility action plan' later this year, which will address accessibility across all modes of public transport. In addition, Aviation Minister Lord Ahmad will be holding talks on

access to air travel for disabled passengers.

Press release: Natural England backs hedges and boundaries for wildlife and people

The [hedgerows and boundaries grant](#), individually worth up to £5,000, is designed to help farmers and other land managers improve important farmland boundaries.

The application window for the £5 million scheme closes on 28 April. Farmers can apply for a one-off grant towards the restoration of a range of traditional boundaries including hedgerows, dry stone walls, stone-faced banks and earth banks. Nearly 800 applicants were successful last year.

Guy Thompson, Chief Operating Officer of Natural England, said:

Hedgerows, dry stone walls and earth banks are a quintessential part of the English countryside. Not only do they perform a vital agricultural role in protecting crops and livestock from the elements, they help support a variety of wildlife. Increasingly farmland boundaries also play a major role in preventing soil loss as well as reducing pollution and flooding. I'm pleased that this grant will help to support these traditional boundaries and the wider benefits that they bring.

Payment rates are fixed for each item. These include hedge-laying or coppicing, hedgerow restoration through gapping-up, stone-faced bank repair and stone wall restoration, which can include a top wiring supplement.

Like the rest of the Countryside Stewardship scheme, the application process is competitive. Applications score more highly if the business has been in a previous Environmental Stewardship agreement or England Woodland Grant Scheme. Priority is given to smaller holdings and restoring hedges or walls is preferred to stone-faced or earth banks. More points are awarded if the application is for more than £1,000, and if the holding is part of a group receiving Facilitation Fund payments.

Grants are not available on land parcels already within Mid or Higher Tier Countryside Stewardship, a live 2016 Hedgerow and Boundary Grant, Higher Level Stewardship or Uplands Entry Level Stewardship on 31 July 2017. Land parcels in Entry Level Stewardship can be included in applications, as long as other eligibility criteria are met.

Grant offers will be made to successful applicants from July 2017. The deadline for submitting claims to Natural England is 31 December 2018.

Customers can apply by downloading an [application form](#) or by using the new online application process which is expected to be available on the [Rural Payments service](#) from early March 2017.

For enquiries (media only) contact: Mary Tomlinson, Senior Press Officer, Natural England. Email: mary.tomlinson@naturalengland.org.uk Telephone: 07771 834 975.

Press release: Lack of controls over cash collections

The Charity Commission ('the Commission') investigated [Al-Hassan Education Centre \(1078159\)](#), a mosque and education centre based in Leeds after it repeatedly failed to file its accounts – see [endnote 1](#). The Commission concluded that the trustees mismanaged the charity.

The Commission uncovered inadequate financial governance at the charity and that the trustees were not able to fully account for the charity's funds in relation to cash collections and charitable expenditure. The charity also failed to submit accounting information for the financial years ending 31 March 2012 and 31 March 2013.

The [inquiry](#) also found that there were wider governance failures within the charity whereby the trustees were not adhering to some of the provisions within their governing document including: failure to hold Annual General Meetings since July 2013 or the required 2 trustee meetings a year and that they had no policies for loans and money laundering. The regulator also concluded there had been mismanagement by the trustees due to a lack of financial controls in relation to cash collected and spent following Friday prayers, and a lack of up to date policies and procedures.

The inquiry considered that the trustees had not acted in the best interests of the charity, put the charity's funds at risk and concluded there was mismanagement and misconduct by the trustees.

On 16 November 2016 the Commission issued an order under the Charities Act to direct the trustees to take certain actions to regularise the charity's governance, submit its outstanding accounting information and review its policies. The trustees have already taken steps to complete the actions, and the Commission will continue to monitor the charity to ensure that its order is complied with.

Carl Mehta, Head of Investigations, Enforcement at the Charity Commission, said:

The trustees in this case failed to take basic steps to ensure that the charity's funds were able to be accounted for. This is simply not acceptable and I expect the trustees to take measures to speedily correct this.

For many faith groups, collecting funds in cash is likely to be a regular occurrence as part of worship or devotion. Charities must ensure that they have in place effective and proper financial controls to ensure those funds are safeguarded.

Trustees can use the Commission's guidance to implement robust internal financial controls that are appropriate to their charity. [Internal financial controls for charities \(CC8\)](#) is available on GOV.UK. There is also a [self-check-list for trustees](#) available.

The full report is available on [GOV.UK](#).

Ends

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1. The Charity Commission is the independent regulator of charities in England and Wales. To find out more about our work, see our [annual report](#).
 2. Search for charities on our [online register](#)
 3. Details of how the Commission reports on its regulatory work can be found on [GOV.UK](#).

Endnotes

1. The inquiry was opened on the 25 February 2015. The charity was previously part of the [class inquiry](#) in April 2014 for failing to submitting accounting information for the financial years ending 31 March 2012 and 31 March 2013.

[News story: Toby Wallace report](#)

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Fatal man overboard from ocean rowing boat in the North Atlantic Ocean.

MAIB's report on the investigation of the man overboard from the ocean rowing boat Toby Wallace in the North Atlantic Ocean with loss of 1 life on 14 February 2016 is now published.

The report contains details of what happened and the subsequent actions taken:

PDF, 1.95MB, 31 pages

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