

# Farming company fined for polluting Somerset watercourse

Magistrates have ordered the company to pay £34,000 in the case brought by the Environment Agency.

Velcourt pleaded guilty at North Somerset Magistrates Court on Monday 4 April 2022, to polluting a tributary of the Hardington Brook, Hardington, Somerset, on or before 1 August 2018.

The company, whose head office is in Ross-on-Wye, was ordered to pay the Environment Agency costs of £14,000, a total fine of £20,000 and a victim surcharge of £170.

On 1 August 2018, the Environment Agency received reports of dead fish in the Hardington Brook and Buckland Brook – tributaries of the River Frome. Officers attended and found dead fish – including brown trout and bullhead in the Hardington Brook.

The next day they traced the discoloured water to a side stream flowing from the direction of Manor Farm, where they found a non-permitted discharge from the farm's surface water drainage system.

The discharge was heavily discoloured, and samples confirmed it would prove fatal to fish because of its concentration of ammonia and very high biological oxygen demand which limited the oxygen supply to the fish in Hardington Brook.

Manor Farm is owned by the Radstock Cooperative Society, but operated on their behalf by Velcourt Ltd, of Orchard House, Phocle Green Business Park, Ross-on-Wye.

The farm manager stopped the discharge and emptied the ditch. But a follow up inspection by an Environment Officer on 14 September 2018 found polluting matter in the ditch.

The inspection concluded the farm's dirty drainage system still posed a 'high potential pollution risk' due to insufficient storage capacity and appropriate engineering. Consequently, farm run-off was able to enter the surface water ditch and subsequently the watercourse.

The Environment Officer concluded the farm infrastructure was not adequately constructed in accordance with the Water Resources (Control of Pollution) (Silage, Slurry and Agricultural Fuel Oil) (England) Regulations 2010 (SSAFO Regulations). Clean and dirty water systems were not adequately separated, and the slurry storage and dirty water drainage systems had not kept pace with the expansion of activities at Manor Farm.

Jo Masters for the Environment Agency said:

We expect much better from such a large and experienced farming business, both for the environment and the local community.

Regulations are in place to protect the environment and our communities and by not keeping up with the regulations this company has put the environment at risk of harm.

Since the incident there has been considerable investment in the farm's infrastructure and Velcourt has also reviewed arrangements at the other farms it manages.

### **Charge:**

On or before 1 August 2018, at Manor Farm, Hardington, Velcourt Ltd caused a water discharge activity not under or to the extent authorised by an environmental permit, namely the discharge of poisonous noxious or polluting matter into a tributary of the Hardington Brook, Somerset.

### **Radstock Cooperative Society**

In 2020 the Environment Agency accepted an Enforcement Undertaking (EU) from Radstock Cooperative Society in relation to their responsibilities in this case.

The Society, which owns Manor Farm, has made a payment of £10,000 to the environmental charity Westcountry River Trust.

### **What is an Enforcement Undertaking?**

An Enforcement Undertaking is a Civil Sanction available to the Environment Agency (EA) as an alternative sanction to prosecution or monetary penalty for dealing with certain environmental offences. It is a legally binding voluntary agreement proposed by a business (or an individual) when the EA has reasonable grounds to suspect that an environmental offence has occurred.

Enforcement Undertakings for environmental offences were introduced under the Environmental Civil Sanctions (England) Order 2010 and the Environmental Civil Sanctions (Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) Regulations 2010.

Accepting an Enforcement Undertaking is always at the discretion of the EA but if accepted enables firms and individuals who have damaged the environment or operated outside of legislative requirements to offer to complete actions which will address the cause and effect of their offending, including making a payment to a suitable environmental project.

EUs can be offered for offences including polluting rivers, breaching permit conditions designed to protect communities, or not registering and follow recycling/recovery obligations. The Environment Agency then carefully considers whether the actions offered by the offender are acceptable.

## Why use Enforcement Undertakings?

- Businesses will voluntarily secure compliance now and in the future, without attracting a criminal record
- The environment, local community and those directly affected by the offending can benefit through actions being offered in an EU
- They allow the EA to deal with the less intentional and polluting offending in a more proportionate way than prosecution through the criminal courts

The Environment Agency reserves the right to prosecute, where offenders do not follow the terms of an Enforcement Undertaking offer.

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## Vehicle stop checks on waste carriers carried out in Gloucester

Press release

Officers from the Environment Agency joined forces with Gloucestershire Police, the Driver Vehicle Standards Agency, Gloucester City Council and Tewkesbury Borough Council on Thursday 24 March to carry out roadside vehicle stop checks in Gloucester.



Giving advice about waste duty of care regulations

The team stopped and checked 16 waste carriers and commercial vehicles, giving advice about the waste duty of care regulations. 11 of the vehicles were carrying waste and, while 9 held a waste carrier registration, 2 were

found to be carrying waste but were not registered. Advice was provided to the drivers to register, and enforcement action is now being considered.

With the Easter spring clean on the horizon, the Environment Agency is reminding anyone looking for someone to take away their home or garden rubbish to check they are registered to do so. They should also ask where the carrier intends to take the waste and make sure they have been provided with a waste transfer note, as required under the waste duty of care regulations.

A spokesperson for the Environment Agency said:

We are dedicated to stamping out waste crime, but it is an ongoing battle against criminals who seek ways to undercut legitimate businesses at the expense of the environment.

Waste operators, including carriers, brokers and dealers, have to be registered to carry waste. However, there are those who operate illegally without being registered.

We all create waste, and we all have a responsibility to ensure our waste is handled legally and correctly so it doesn't cause harm to human health or pollution to the environment.

Our advice to homeowners and businesses is to check someone is registered to take your waste away, by asking for the waste carrier's permit number and confirming that it is listed in the register of waste carriers, brokers and dealers. You could be breaking the law and be at risk of prosecution if your waste isn't managed properly.

To report any waste crime or a company is operating illegally, call the Environment Agency 24/7 on 0800 807060 or report it anonymously to Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

Check your waste collector is a registered carrier before you use them: <https://environment.data.gov.uk/public-register/view/search-waste-carriers-brokers>.

Published 5 April 2022

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## **[Scientific review of shale gas launched](#)**

The government has today (Tuesday 5 April 2022) commissioned the British

Geological Survey to advise on the latest scientific evidence around shale gas extraction.

Ministers have always been clear that the exploration of shale gas reserves in England could only proceed if the science shows that it is safe, sustainable and of minimal disturbance to those living and working nearby.

In November 2019, ministers announced a pause on activity in England after a report by the North Sea Transition Authority found it was not possible to accurately predict the probability or magnitude of earthquakes linked to hydraulic fracturing operations.

At the time, ministers confirmed the pause would remain in place unless and until further evidence is provided that shale gas extraction can be carried out safely. Any exploration or development of shale gas would need to meet rigorous safety and environmental protections both above ground and sub-surface.

While shale gas extraction is not the solution to near-term price issues, it is right that all possible energy generation and production methods are kept on the table following the unprovoked invasion of Ukraine by President Putin's regime.

Today's request has been made to assess if any progress has been made in the scientific understanding which underpins government policy, and to allow ministers to consider next steps. A report is expected before the end of June 2022.

Business and Energy Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng said:

We have always been, and always will be, guided by the science on shale gas.

It remains the case that fracking in England would take years of exploration and development before commercial quantities of gas could be produced for the market, and would certainly have no effect on prices in the near term.

However, there will continue to be an ongoing demand for oil and gas over the coming decades as we transition to cheap renewable energy and new nuclear power. In light of Putin's criminal invasion of Ukraine, it is absolutely right that we explore all possible domestic energy sources.

However, unless the latest scientific evidence demonstrates that shale gas extraction is safe, sustainable and of minimal disturbance to those living and working nearby, the pause in England will remain in place.

The British Geological Survey has been asked to investigate:

- whether there have been new developments in the science of hydraulic fracturing – in particular, whether there are new techniques in use which could reduce the risk and magnitude of seismic events
- if there are new techniques, whether scientists are confident that they would be suitable for use in fracturing in the UK, with its specific geology and high population density
- given any new developments in these technologies, how the seismicity caused by fracturing compares to other forms of underground energy production, such as geothermal, coal mining, or surface activities such as construction, and the evidence on the different ‘safe’ thresholds for activity, whether they remain the correct ones, and whether differences between them remain justified
- how the modelling of geologies such as shale has improved in the period since the pause of fracturing was implemented in 2019 and whether that means ministers could be completely confident about the modelling of seismic events and their predictability
- whether there are other sites, outside of Lancashire, which might be at a lower risk of seismic activity and what level of confidence government would have in the assessment of seismic activity in these areas

In commissioning this work, the government is clear that this should be a desk-based exercise by the British Geological Survey, and so no drilling of any further test wells or seismic monitoring will take place.

- The British Geological Survey (BGS) advises the UK government on all aspects of geoscience, as well as providing impartial advice on geological matters to the public, academics and industry. BGS is a component body of UK Research and Innovation
- the Business and Energy Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng [has written to the British Geological Survey](#) setting out the terms of reference for their work. A report is expected before the end of June 2022
- in November 2019 ministers [announced a pause on hydraulic fracturing](#)

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## [Welsh Secretary Visits USA to Boost Trade and Investment](#)

News story

Secretary of State for Wales Simon Hart’s itinerary includes meeting business representatives, political figures and a visit to a nuclear power plant.



USA flag

Welsh Secretary Simon Hart is this week (5-9 April) travelling to the United States on a mission to boost trade and investment in Wales.

With Welsh exports to the US worth almost £1.8bn a year, there are significant economic links between the two countries and there is huge further potential for Welsh business.

Following January's lifting of restrictions of imports of British lamb to the US market after more than two decades, Mr Hart will meet officials from the US Department for Agriculture and the Meat Importers Council to discuss the involvement of Welsh exporters when trade in lamb resumes. Potential investment in nuclear energy in Wales is also central to the Welsh Secretary's itinerary with talks planned with key figures in the sector.

Mr Hart's programme includes:

- Meeting key business representatives – including from the manufacturing and energy sectors.
- Holding talks with US political figures.
- Visiting Plant Vogtle, Georgia to see the construction of Westinghouse's AP-1000 reactor and meet senior representatives of Westinghouse, Southern Nuclear and engineering firm Bechtel.

### **Speaking ahead of his visit, Welsh Secretary Simon Hart said:**

With the backdrop of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the relationship between the United Kingdom and the United States has never been more important.

There are strong and important economic and cultural ties between Wales and our American friends and it is fantastic to be able to promote these and help strengthen them further.

Over the last two years we have seen significant developments in our relationship that have been extremely beneficial to Wales, from the lifting of steel tariffs to the new exporting opportunities for Welsh lamb.

I want to build on this progress and will be discussing further opportunities for investment in Wales with nuclear energy at the heart of those discussions.

The Welsh Secretary's itinerary also includes:

- Talks with the US Department for Agriculture and the Meat Importers Council about future imports to the US of Welsh lamb.
- An event with the British American Business Association to promote Wales.
- Meeting senior figures from energy company Valero – already a major investor in Wales.
- Talks with politicians of the Friends of Wales caucus in the US Congress.

Mr Hart travels to Washington DC on Tuesday, 5 April and then on to Georgia on Thursday 7 April with his visit supported by the British Embassy, part of the UK's extensive world-wide diplomatic network.

Published 5 April 2022

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## **OSCE calls a Special Council meeting on Russian atrocities in Irpin and Bucha: UK statement, 5 April 2022**

Thank you Mr Chair. Each occasion we have met in Special Permanent Council has marked a further appalling development as President Putin pursues his brutal war of choice in Ukraine. But today we reflect on a new and deeply disturbing low – apparent executions in cold blood on a shocking scale.

As Russian troops have been forced into retreat, we are seeing increasing evidence of appalling acts perpetrated by those invading forces in towns such as Irpin and Bucha. Hundreds of bodies have been discovered as towns have been liberated.

We have watched in horror as reports have emerged of men, women and children – and children – killed and mutilated. Of mass graves. And of footage showing people shot at close range, with their hands and feet bound and their bodies left to lie in the street. What further horrors await discovery? This is a great moral stain upon the Russian army, and one which will never be forgotten.

The perpetrators of these appalling acts must be held to account. Deliberate

killings of civilians during Russia's illegal and unjustifiable invasion of Ukraine must be investigated as war crimes. We will not allow Russia to cover up their involvement in these atrocities through cynical disinformation, and we will ensure that the reality of Russia's actions are brought to light. We will not rest until those responsible for atrocities, including military commanders and individuals in the Russian Government have faced justice. [The United Kingdom has been at the forefront of supporting the International Criminal Court's investigation into the situation in Ukraine.](#) We led the largest State referral to the ICC in its history. [The OSCE's Moscow Mechanism has an important role to play in contributing to this process,](#) and it will continue to have the United Kingdom's full support. Nothing is forgotten, and nobody will be forgotten.

Mr Chair, in this room Russian colleagues have told us they had no intention of invading Ukraine – a lie. They told us Ukraine was bombing their own schools and hospitals – a lie. Now they tell us Ukraine is executing their own civilian population. Have they no shame? There is no flag large enough to cover the shame of killing innocent people.

Mr Chair, the Russian government still has the chance to stop this senseless war. But while Russia continues instead with its senseless barbarity, it is essential that the international community continues to provide Ukraine with the humanitarian and military support it so dearly needs, and that we step up sanctions to cut off funding for President Putin's war machine at source. The world is watching, and we will not forget.

I kindly ask that you attach this statement to the journal of the day. Thank you Mr Chair.