

Press release: Water companies need to do more to protect the environment, report shows

Although there has been a gradual improving trend in environmental performance over recent years, the industry is not doing enough to reduce serious pollution incidents and comply with permits. Last year saw a rise in the most serious pollution incidents, with 'Category 1' incidents at 11. Previous reductions in serious (Category 1 and 2) incidents have also plateaued continuing at around one incident per week.

[The Water and Sewerage Companies' Environmental Performance Report](#) rates how well the big nine water and sewage companies (operating mainly or wholly in England) managed their impact on the environment in 2017. This is done across a wide range of measures – including pollution, managing sewage and complying with permits – and also compares individual company performance.

For the third year running, United Utilities and Wessex Water were the top performing water companies, and now Severn Trent Water has joined them. These companies received the top 4 star rating.

While the majority of companies delivered a 'good' or 'leading' performance, there are some poorer performers – the report reveals an urgent need by South West Water and Northumbrian Water to improve their performance which has seen them rated lowest this year. South West Water are the worst performer on pollution incidents and Northumbrian Water on permit compliance.

This comes in the face of record fines for the sector – in total more than £21million were issued as a result of 16 successful prosecutions by the Environment Agency. This has been driven by changes in Sentencing Guidelines. Earlier in the year, Emma Howard Boyd, Chair of the Environment Agency, called for fines for the most serious pollution incidents to be proportionate to the turnover of water companies.

Despite some good performances, the report demands far greater progress in 2018 and subsequent years. The Environment Agency has recently set out a more ambitious programme of environmental improvements which water companies will have to make between 2020 and 2025 – totalling £5billion of investment.

Toby Willison, Executive Director of Operations for the Environment Agency, said:

The leading companies in this report show that reducing their environmental impact can be done, so we look to companies to share good practice and improve quickly. But one serious pollution incident is one too many. We will always work closely with companies who want to do the right thing but we will take action

against those who don't.

Over the last 30 years there has been a significant improvement in water quality and this has happened not only thanks to the industry's massive investment but also the Environment Agency's strong regulatory role

The environment will benefit from a further £5billion of investment from the water sector by 2025. We expect to see a clear and continued focus on environmental performance in the next round of water company business plans to be submitted in the autumn.

The report concludes with a reminder about the pressures on water quality and supply – with a growing population and climate pressures on the water environment, and increased public and legal expectation, water companies need to further rise to the challenge and improve promptly. The Environment Agency will work with and regulate the companies to help achieve a better environment.

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[Press release: Highways England](#)

boosting local economy with multi-million pound upgrade of M1

The section of M1 between junctions 13 and 16 is nearly 23 miles in length, passing through Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire and provides connections to the towns of Bedford, Milton Keynes and Northampton.

It is also a key route for traffic travelling north and south and will see some 60 miles of smart motorway connecting the south of England at the M25 all the way to Catthorpe (Leicestershire) at junction 19.

Work officially starts on the scheme on 8 August and once completed, some £959m of benefits for the local area will be delivered by boosting productivity with less congestion and more reliable journeys.

It will also provide added-lane capacity on the motorway to support the development of new houses.

In Northamptonshire some 18,870 new homes are due to be built from 2011 to 2029. In Milton Keynes before 2031, the council proposes to build 26,500 new homes.

Motorists travelling through the area currently suffer from congestion with daily traffic volumes around 116,000 vehicles per day on each section, with that number shooting up to more than 140,000 vehicles per day on a Friday.

In amongst that mix, heavy goods vehicles include between 16 and 21% of the total traffic flow. Once complete, the work will see:

- an upgrade of junctions 13 to 16 to four lanes running with no hard shoulder to increase capacity
- 38 new emergency areas (EAs) and emergency roadside telephones will be installed at emergency areas
- provision of new superspan gantries to support variable mandatory speed limits and driver information
- the hardening of the central reserve and installation of a rigid concrete barrier (RCB) between J13-15 to help prevent vehicle cross-overs from opposite sides of the carriageway

Highways England project sponsor, Tabatha Bailey, said:

This is vital work to improve journeys through a busy stretch of the M1 and once complete, will boost the local economy by increasing capacity and supporting future housing development.

It will provide a continuous smart motorway from the M25 all the way to junction 19 at Catthorpe. This means that a key arterial route in England will offer increased capacity and more reliable journeys for the hundreds of thousands of people that use the M1 every day.

To make journeys more reliable, motorists using that stretch of road will be given real-time traffic information using the latest technology which will allow them to plan more efficiently.

Narrow lanes will be in place for the duration of the work with a speed limit of 50mph in place to ensure the safety of motorists and the workforce.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

[Press release: A boon for bees as Environment Agency trials pollinator project](#)

The beloved bumblebee is one of dozens of species set to benefit from an Environment Agency project to improve habitat for pollinators.

A pioneering pilot scheme in Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire sees Environment Agency teams adapting their routine work in a bid to boost biodiversity.

The teams, who maintain thousands of kilometres of river and reservoir banks that serve as flood defences, have been experimenting with the frequency and timings of maintenance work, like grass-cutting, on the banks to see what best preserves the wildflowers and herbs bees need.

They have also compared the results of removing the grass-clippings or leaving them in situ – and have found that removing them helps plants like clover, ox-eye daisies, dandelions and buttercups flourish.

Tapping into expert guidance from a consultant botanist and entomologist, the trial aims to increase the native bee population including bufftail, solitary, carpenter, mining and leaf-cutting bees, as well as butterflies, moths, and other pollinators.

This season marks the third year of the 5 year pilot – and also marks the third annual [Bees Needs Week](#), an initiative by government, conservation

groups, industry and retailers to raise awareness of simple things anyone can do to support pollinators, like growing more flowers and leaving patches of their garden to grow wild.

At the same time, biodiversity officers have also been making the most of EA-owned buildings like pumping stations and unused land to install bee boxes, hotels and havens made of natural scrap material – many of which were occupied almost immediately.

Nikki Loveday, biodiversity officer with the Environment Agency, said:

It's our mission to protect people and wildlife and this is a brilliant example of how being flexible and innovative can help us achieve more for our environment.

We're adapting how we carry out vital maintenance on our flood defences and looking for any opportunity to support our precious pollinators and the wider ecology.

Ultimately, if we can make small changes at no cost we'll aim to share our learning and inspire others to do the same to have a big impact.

Meanwhile, a series of workshops for staff are helping them learn more about pollinators and how to identify and create simple habitats. More than 50 staff have already putting this training to use in their daily work – for example, drilling holes in wooden posts for carpenter bees when fixing fences.

Entomologist Steven Falk, an expert in bees, hoverflies and other pollinators, who has delivered the training and advised on the project, said:

Bees and other pollinators put approximately a third of all the food we eat onto our plates, and it's so important we support them by protecting and enhancing their habitat.

We know from experience that doing the right things, like enriching their nesting and foraging spaces, will increase the population of our pollinators. Even small changes can make a big difference of lots of people do them at lots of sites.

The Environment Agency is in a good position to contribute since it oversees so much land and it gives me great pleasure to work with them to give a boost to our bees.

For more on small actions you can take to support pollinators, visit <https://www.bumblebeeconservation.org/bees-needs/>.

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