

Companies hit with fines after sewage kills thousands of fish

Anglian Water and a contractor have been fined a total of £60,000 after raw sewage leaked into a river killing more than 2,400 fish.

On 27 December 2018, a sewer owned by Anglian Water collapsed in Stanground, Peterborough.

The water company employed contractors Danaher and Walsh to come in and fix the problem temporarily.

Danaher and Walsh set up an over-pumping system to pump the sewage back into the drainage system. However, it became blocked with rag; items that shouldn't be flushed, like baby wipes. A few days later, it failed, leading to sewage ending up in Stanground Lode.

Neither company reported the incident to the Environment Agency; instead, a concerned member of the public called the agency's incident hotline.

Environment Agency investigators found that the watercourse had been polluted for 1.6 kilometres and that at least 2,413 fish died. Among the species killed by the sewage were roach, bream, pike and European eel. This species is currently listed as a "critically endangered" species under the International Union for the Conservation of Nature.

Fish recovered from Stanground Lode

It's believed that untreated sewage could have been discharging into the river for up to 10 hours. Levels of ammonia monitored downstream from the discharge were found to be 200 times higher than average water quality standards.

In mitigation, Danaher and Walsh said it would have been unable to predict how much rag would be flushed in this time. It said that it had never come across a blockage like that seen at Stanground in 30 years of operating.

Both companies appeared at Peterborough magistrates' court on 1 June 2022, where they both pleaded guilty. They were charged with causing an illegal sewage discharge between 5 January and 8 January 2019 which polluted Stanground Lode. This is contrary to regulations 12(1)(b) and 38(1)(a) of the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016.

The judge deemed there was a low level of culpability from both defendants. Anglian Water was fined £50,000 and told to pay £24,387.58 in costs. Danaher and Walsh was fined £10,000 and told to pay £5,000 in costs.

Yvonne Daly, an environment manager at the Environment Agency in

Cambridgeshire, said:

The Environment Agency takes such devastating pollution incidents incredibly seriously.

Anyone caught breaching environmental laws faces enforcement action, up to and including prosecution.

We are disappointed with the fine issued in this case and would like to see higher penalties to really deter polluters from future offences.

Both companies in this case failed in their environmental duties, leaving to a devastating impact on the local biodiversity. Moreover, they failed to notify the Environment Agency when something had gone wrong.

We are grateful to the vigilant members of the public that did report the pollution. Anyone with any concerns about pollution should contact us on 0800 807060.

- The Environment Agency does not decide the fines handed out to companies and individuals who pollute our rivers. This is down to the courts.
- We will always ensure the courts have all the information they need to impose appropriate sentences.
- In 2021, the courts fined water companies £102,490,000 for pollution incidents following our prosecutions.
- Anglian Water was recently prosecuted by the Environment Agency following the deaths of more than 5,000 fish in Essex. Read more: [Anglian Water fined £300,000 after pollution killed 5,000 fish – GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/anglian-water-fined-300000-after-pollution-killed-5000-fish)
- Only pee, poo and toilet paper should go down the toilet.
- Individual actions count. Small steps such as not pouring fats and oils down the sink or flushing wet wipes and other plastic products down the loo can help to protect water quality.