

[Press release: Charities paid £190,000 after North East pollution incidents](#)

The Environment Agency has accepted four Enforcement Undertakings which will see more than £190,000 paid to North East charities after breaches in environmental permitting regulations.

Northumbrian Water Ltd will pay £50,000 to Wear Rivers Trust as well as carrying out site restoration and remediation work and making improvements to its infrastructure and reporting mechanisms.

It follows a pollution incident at Wapping Burn at its confluence with Gore Burn near Peterlee, which happened in April 2016.

An ecology survey carried out on 27 April found that the pollution had caused a minor negative impact downstream of the discharge.

Northumbrian Water will also pay £135,000 split equally between Durham Wildlife Trust, Wear Rivers Trust and the Marine Conservation Society.

It follows a pollution incident which happened in the summer of 2016 at a stream behind Aykley Heads in Durham. Environment Agency officers located a sewer pipe crossing the stream in the river bed, which was causing the pollution downstream. The sewer had cracked underneath the water.

Northumbrian Water has since repaired that whole length of sewer pipe.

Slurry discharge

Dairy farmer Alan Newton, 54, from Gibbet Hills Farm in Howden Le Wear has paid £7,842 to Wear Rivers Trust as well as making improvements to his site and infrastructure.

This follows a discharge of slurry from an earth banked lagoon from Gibbet Hills Farm to Beechburn Beck in November 2017, resulting in over 3km of the beck being affected.

Once advised about the leak Mr Newton acted instantly, blocking the pipe and removing the slurry from ditches on the land which were leaking into the beck. He also cut a ditch to collect slurry which had soaked into land. He has since removed the pipe outlet and reinstated an earth bank with clay lining, has installed an automatic irrigation system and states he will install a slurry level indicator and check the structure daily.

And M&K Hodgson Limited, which operates a pig farm called Handale Banks Farm at Liverton near Loftus, will pay £5,300 to Tees Rivers Trust after a pollution incident at Waytail Beck at Loftus that was identified as being a result of pig slurry spreading at the farm.

The majority of the pollution came from a field that had never been spread

upon before and despite asking the correct relevant questions about land drainage prior to the incident the slurry entered underground field drains and affected 2km of the beck.

The company will not be spreading in this location in future and is exploring ways to reduce the need to spread during the winter months, including investing in ways to separate rain water from dirty water using off-site storage.

EU's a 'more proportionate response'

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, including Enforcement Undertakings, to either improve performance or stop sites from operating. Fiona Morris, Environment Manager with the Environment Agency in the North East, said:

We will always take forward prosecutions in the most serious cases but sometimes we feel an Enforcement Undertaking a more proportionate response that benefits the environment, achieving more than if the companies had been convicted and fined.

In these cases the companies took immediate action to rectify the situation and have since taken steps to prevent it from happening again. The affected watercourses will now benefit from some great environmental work by local charities.

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.

Jim Cokill, Director of Durham Wildlife Trust, added:

Durham Wildlife Trust will use the funds to support urgent work to halt the continued decline of the water vole across the region.

The water vole is a species that is under real threat of extinction across the UK, with declines of over 90% in recent decades. The Wildlife Trusts in the North East are leading the effort to save this charismatic species and enhance the rivers, streams and wetlands that are its home.

Enforcement Undertakings can be a proportionate and cost-effective way for businesses to make amends for less serious environmental offences. The company or individual must offer to restore or remediate the harm caused by

the incident, and demonstrate they will change their behaviour and ensure future compliance with the law.

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

The full list of Enforcement Undertakings is [now available online.](#)