

Press release: Northumberland farmer fined for failing to fix pollution risk

A Northumberland farmer who was fined £19,000 last year for twice polluting a protected watercourse has been ordered to pay a further £2,854.56 in fines and costs for failing to fix the source of the pollution.

John Laing, 54, of New Heaton Farm in Cornhill-on-Tweed, Northumberland, appeared at Berwick upon Tweed Magistrates' Court on 5 April 2018 having previously admitted contempt of court.

The court heard that in January 2017 Laing was ordered by Newcastle Magistrates' Court to repair the storage unit by 30 June 2017. Without remedial works, there remains a continued risk of silage leaking from a silo storage unit into a tributary that flows into the River Till.

The order had required Laing to carry out specific works to capture and prevent any effluent from escaping the silo, and provide written certification from a chartered engineer that the works had been completed to the required standards. Environment Agency officers made several visits to the farm before and after the deadline to check whether the works had been completed.

While Laing had enlisted the services of a builder, work had not started before the June 2017 deadline. Subsequent visits by Environment Agency officers in August and September 2017 revealed that some work had begun but not as agreed and to a poor standard.

In mitigation, Laing said he had relied on the assurances of a builder as to the quality of the remedial work and was no longer using the storage facility himself.

Neil Paisley, Senior Agriculture Officer at the Environment Agency, said:

John Laing has repeatedly shown a disregard for the law and a disregard for the environment since an initial pollution incident in 2014.

Pollution of any watercourse is a serious offence because of the devastating impact it can have on fish, wildlife and ecosystems. We will take action against anyone who fails to act in accordance with environmental laws and fails to comply with orders to ensure pollution is prevented.

If anyone spots a potential pollution issue they can report it to the Environment Agency's free 24-hour incident hotline on 0800 80 70 60.