

Press release: River pollution costs Devon farmer £9,500 for leaky silage clamp

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A farmer has been ordered to pay £9,500 in fines and costs for polluting a tributary of the River Exe in Devon. The case was brought by the Environment Agency.

On 16 July 2015, Environment Agency officers visited Cleave Farm, Templeton near Tiverton following a report of pollution. They found a tributary heavily contaminated with sewage fungus for 100 metres before it entered a larger stream that was also contaminated with sewage fungus.

The pollution was traced to a silage clamp at Cleave Farm. The farmer, Winston Reed, told officers the silage effluent should have been directed to a slurry store, but was leaking into a watercourse from a surface water ditch. Officers were told a drain in the farm yard had been blocked off, but cracked concrete around the drain had allowed effluent to escape into the surface water system.

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Exeter Crown Court heard that Winston Reed either by himself or his company, Reed Farms Ltd, which is currently in administration, is a persistent polluter. In 2006 Winston Reed was cautioned for allowing slurry to enter a stream. Then Reed Farms Ltd caused significant pollution incidents in 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012, which resulted in the company being either prosecuted or cautioned.

Since 2012, Officers had tried to work with Mr Reed to bring about changes at the farm to improve infrastructure, including visits from the Catchment Sensitive Farming programme.

Mischka Hewins of the Environment Agency said:

We always prefer to work in partnership with farmers to achieve compliance through advice and guidance. It's disappointing when this fails and our only option to change behaviour and prevent pollution is to prosecute.

Anyone concerned about pollution to water or land can call the Environment Agency's free 24-hour incident line on 0800 807060.

On 15 December 2017, Winston Kenneth Reed pleaded guilty to causing a water discharge activity without an environmental permit, namely the discharge of silage effluent, which is polluting matter, from Cleave Farm, Templeton, Tiverton, Devon into inland freshwaters contrary to Regulations 12(1)(b) and 38(1)(a) Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2010. Fined £2,000 plus £120 victim surcharge. Ordered to pay Environment Agency costs of £7,500

The term 'sewage fungus' describes a group of micro-organisms, which contain filamentous bacteria, fungi and/or stalked protozoa. Their presence is an indication of organic/nutrient pollution in a watercourse.