

Sewage in water – a growing public health problem

One of the greatest public health triumphs of the last 200 years was separating human faeces from drinking water. People now take this for granted but it was the basis for preventing cholera, typhoid and other bacterial and viral diarrhoeal diseases that killed millions in major epidemics. Largely achieved through remarkable feats of engineering over two centuries, only vaccination matches it as a public health intervention for preventing infectious diseases. When bacteria from human faeces (coliforms) are ingested, it increases the risk of significant infections including antibiotic resistant bacteria. Keeping human faeces out of water people might ingest remains a public health priority.

Tap water in the UK is safe. No-one expects river water to be of drinking standard, but where people swim or children play they should not expect significant doses of human coliforms if they ingest water. Raw sewage from storm overflows and continuous discharge of waste containing viable organisms from sewage treatment works is an increasing problem. This is a serious public health issue for government and regulators and it is clear that the water companies are not doing enough. The public health dangers are in addition to the ecological and environmental impact which forms the basis for much regulation.

Use of our rivers for recreation and exercise is something to celebrate and encourage. Children have always played in waterways and always will, irrespective of what notices are put up next to them. People of all ages use freshwater waterways such as rivers for recreation including swimming and various forms of boating. During lockdown many people took to swimming in rivers and have continued since. Our rivers, seas and waterways should therefore be free from sewage to reduce risk to the public. There are two major issues to tackle. Both have solutions.

The first is raw sewage discharge from the sewage network and in particular storm overflows. As the name implies this should be an exceptionally rare. The engineering logic of storm overflows is that if the sewerage system is at risk of being overwhelmed by storms or atypically intense rain, sewers get too full and can back up into homes or overflow into streets. To prevent that, storm overflows act as a safety release valve, but were intended only for exceptional circumstances when the public would be unlikely to be using rivers.

After the Environment Agency required the water industry to install monitors on overflows, data shows that their use is now not exceptional. In some cases, up to 200 discharges a year are occurring. This is obviously unacceptable on public health grounds. Whilst zero discharges are technically achievable the cost of this may not be justified; to reduce the frequency down to genuine storms should however be a minimum expectation. It certainly is the expectation of the great majority of the public, including those who

do not themselves use rivers recreationally as measured by polling data. Nobody wants a child to ingest human faeces.

There are solutions to getting storm overflows back to only functioning only in very high rainfall conditions. These involve better operational management, innovation and investment. This this is rightly seen as the job of water companies. As a start, four have recently agreed to reduce their overflows to an average of no more than 20 discharges a year by 2025- but we need to go much further and Ofwat and the Environment Agency will hold companies to account for this delivery.

The second major issue is coliforms from the continuous normal discharge from sewage works. Whilst raw sewage is not discharged into waterways from these, viable bacteria and viruses are, as part of normal operations. Eliminating discharges of coliforms from sewage works upstream of popular recreational areas will go a long way to reducing human faecal infective organisms downstream. This has been achieved for seaside beaches at coastal works by use of ultraviolet treatment. Other forms of less energy intensive treatment are in trial or development: these options need to be pushed forward by companies with urgency.

It will inevitably require investment to boost resilience and capacity in our sewerage system. But it is not just a question of money- it needs preventive engineering, better sewer management, innovation and commitment. We welcome recent initiatives by some companies, but a lot more needs to be done. Ofwat asked all companies to produce an action plan setting out how they will rapidly improve river health. As they finalise plans, they must demonstrate a commitment to public health that matches public expectation. We have two stretches of river in England and Wales with bathing water status. There are over 500 in France.

We recognise management of sewers is made more difficult by plastic wet wipes flushed down toilets which congeal together with fats poured down drains to form fatbergs that block sewers and cause avoidable use of the storm overflows. Ensuring all of us put wetwipes in bins or, better, that only rapidly biodegradable wet wipes are available would immediately assist in reducing avoidable outflow problems.

However, the principal public health responsibility for ensuring human faeces and viable human faecal bacteria do not get into waterways people might use recreationally rest squarely with the water companies and their directors. Ministers have already signalled they want significant action, requiring companies to deliver a multi-billion programme to tackle storm sewage discharges. Companies should take the initiative and go faster. Regulators will hold companies to account. It is time for wastewater companies to act. It will be a matter of choice if they do not.

For information on the action the government is taking on water quality, visit [here](#)

[Pride Month 2022: British Embassy joins parade in Guatemala](#)

World news story

The British Embassy joined Guatemala's pride parade with other diplomatic missions in support of human rights of LGBTQI+ persons.



British Embassy staff led by Ambassador Nick Whittingham, participated in Guatemala's pride event on 25 June. The famous parade returned alongside a slew of events in collaboration with different human rights organizations.

Unfortunately, the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons remain vulnerable or actively violated in many places. LGBTQI+ status or conduct is still illegal in 70 countries around the world. In far too many parts of the world being lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, or simply gender non-conforming means that even the most basic of daily activities such as going to work or to the doctor's office can result in violence, harassment and deep social exclusion.

By participating in this year's event, the United Kingdom and other allies honoured the resilience of LGBTQI+ people in Guatemala, who are fighting to live authentically and freely. We reaffirm our belief that LGBTQI+ rights are human rights. We remain committed to ending violence and discrimination because of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, and sex characteristics.

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Minister for Asia and the Middle East visits Israel, the OPTs and Jordan

- Minister Milling made her first visit to Israel, focused on deepening science and tech ties.
- In the Occupied Palestinian Territories, the Minister visited communities at risk of eviction and displacement in Sheikh Jarrah and Masafer Yatta.
- The Minister also announced £95m in new aid funding to support vulnerable Jordanian households and refugee children living in the country.

On 22 June in Israel, the Minister visited the Peres Centre to learn how Israel became the Start-Up Nation and discussed how the Centre's peace-building projects are bringing young people together. She also met participants from one of the UK's peacebuilding projects, Search for Common Ground, who work to promote peace and help bridge divides between different communities.

The Minister covered how the UK and Israel can deepen science, technology and innovation ties with a visit to the Hebrew University's Nanotechnology Centre to see examples of leading Research and Development. In her meeting with Deputy Foreign Minister Idan Roll, they discussed the ambitious UK-Israel Bilateral Roadmap, which will define the next decade of UK-Israeli cooperation across a range of sectors, including defence and security, trade, cyber and science and tech. They also discussed regional issues of mutual concern and the Minister encouraged efforts to promote the Two State Solution.

The Minister then travelled to the Occupied Palestinian Territories from 23 to 24 June. She held a series of meetings with the Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh, Foreign Minister Riyad al Malki and Secretary General of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation Hussein Al Sheikh, reiterating the UK's support for the Palestinian people and a Two State Solution.

The Minister visited Palestinians at risk of eviction and displacement in East Jerusalem's Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood and Masafer Yatta in the South Hebron Hills. The UK continues to oppose evictions and demolitions, which are illegal under international law in all but the most exceptional circumstances.

The Minister also discussed the UK's support to the Palestinian economy with prominent business leaders, before a discussion on the pressures on civic space in the OPTs with journalists, human rights defenders and representatives of civil society organisations.

The Minister then travelled to Jordan. During her meeting with Jordanian Foreign Minister HE Ayman Safadi she reiterated the importance of the UK-

Jordan strategic partnership and the UK's commitment to sustaining cooperation with Jordan across diplomatic, development, economic and security files.

She also met the Ministers of Finance and Planning and welcomed Jordan's Vision for Economic Modernisation 2033, taking forward vital economic reforms and building on the 2019 London Initiative conference. The Minister reiterated the UK's commitment to help Jordan's economic development and prosperity, which are key to the country's stability.

The Minister also visited Al Azraq refugee camp to see first-hand UK-funded humanitarian programmes in support of Syrian refugees and spoke to representatives from UN agencies and the Syrian Refugees Affairs Directorate. She also saw a World Food Programme-contracted supermarket, where refugees can exchange food vouchers to buy food.

On completing the visit, Minister Milling said:

I was delighted to make my first official visit to Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Jordan as Minister for the Middle East.

I covered a lot of ground in a short space of time in Israel where the relationship has never been stronger. From fascinating examples of Israeli tech and innovation, to the upcoming UK-Israel Bilateral Roadmap, to peacebuilding projects and efforts to promote the two-state solution.

Visiting the Occupied Palestinian Territories was a fantastic opportunity to meet a whole range of Palestinians to discuss the UK-Palestinian bilateral relationship and understand the impact of the occupation. I was particularly pleased to meet with Palestinian civil society to reassure them of the UK's unwavering support for media freedom and human rights defenders.

Last year we celebrated 100 years of friendship between the UK and Jordan, a friendship that the UK is fully committed to sustaining and developing into its second century. I expressed my gratitude for the Kingdom's extraordinary and generous role in supporting refugees from regional conflicts, and announced two major new UK-funded programmes totalling £95m designed to support both vulnerable Jordanians and refugees.

I look forward to visiting the region again soon.

Bounce Back Loan fraudster jailed

Abdulrazag Zagroba, 54, from Manchester, appeared at Manchester Crown Court on Friday 24 June 2022 where he was sentenced to 24 months before Recorder Hudson.

This was the first successful criminal prosecution of a bounce bank loan fraudster for the Insolvency Service, which also saw Abdulrazag Zagroba disqualified from acting as a director for 7 years.

The court heard that Zagroba was sole director of Amigo Pizza (Manchester) Ltd, incorporated in January 2020. The company operated a pizza takeaway business in the Stretford area of Manchester until it was dissolved in October the same year.

Zagroba's application to dissolve the company was originally signed on 17 June 2020 but less than two weeks later, he applied for a Bounce Back Loan of £20,000.

Zagroba did not disclose to the bank that the company was already in the process of being dissolved and he signed the loan declaration stating the company would be able to make repayments. By the time the loan was due to be repaid in June 2021, the company had already been dissolved.

The terms of the Bounce Back Loan were clear that funds could only be used for business purposes and not personal use.

However, when interviewed under caution by Insolvency Service investigators, Zagroba admitted to having no intention of using the Bounce Back Loan for the business.

Zagroba claimed that he arranged for friends to travel with around £14,000 in cash to give to his family abroad. He used the remaining £6,000 to buy a car and insurance.

He pleaded guilty to charges of fraudulently claiming Covid-19 financial support to which he was not entitled contrary to the Companies Act 2006 and the Fraud Act 2006 at Manchester City Magistrate's Court on 9 May.

Julie Barnes, Chief Investigator at the Insolvency Service said:

Covid loans were designed to support viable businesses during the pandemic. Abdulrazag Zagroba, however, cynically sought to exploit the covid loan scheme and by dissolving his company, he intended to frustrate any attempt by the lender from taking action to recover the outstanding loan.

This sentence should serve as a warning to others who engaged in this behaviour, and they should come clean and repay the money before it is too late.

Notes to editors

Abdulrazag Zagroba of Manchester and his date of birth is January 1968.

Amigo Pizza (Manchester) Ltd – CRO 12406923).

The sentence result was announced at Manchester Crown court by Miss Recorder Hudson:

- Section 2 Fraud Act 2006 (Fraud by false representation) – 24 months' imprisonment (immediate)
- s1007 Companies Act 2006 – aggravated striking off offence – 20 months' imprisonment (to run concurrently).

[Further information about the work of the Insolvency Service, and how to complain about financial misconduct.](#)

Contact Press Office

You can also follow the Insolvency Service on:

[An inspection of the immigration system as it relates to the agricultural sector](#)

News story

The inspection team anticipates reporting to the Home Secretary by September



Further to the [call for evidence](#) published in May, the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration has defined the scope for his inspection of the immigration system as it relates to the agricultural sector.

The Borders Act 2007 requires that the Chief Inspector monitors and reports on the efficiency and effectiveness of areas relating to the immigration and border functions undertaken on behalf of the Home Secretary. Therefore, the scope will be limited to the areas that are the direct responsibility of the Home Office. In particular, the inspection will focus on:

- the effectiveness of the immigration routes available for agricultural workers, including through the skilled worker route and the seasonal worker route, to support the UK's agricultural sector
- the extent and quality of communication and engagement between the Home Office and the agricultural sector
- the effectiveness of compliance requirements on sponsors, and how the Home Office assures itself that sponsors of migrant agricultural workers are upholding requirements, including those relating to worker welfare and employment conditions.

The inspection team anticipates reporting to the Home Secretary by September.

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