

Charities at risk of 'underestimating' online fraud as one in eight experienced cybercrime last year

The Charity Commission is warning charities against the risk of online fraud, as a new survey found around one in eight charities (12%) had experienced cybercrime in the previous 12 months.

This follows earlier findings indicating that the pandemic prompted increasing numbers of charities to move to digital fundraising and operating, exposing them to the risk of cybercrime.

Most concerningly, the survey highlighted a potential lack of awareness of the risks facing charities online, with just over 24% having a formal policy in place to manage the risk. Similarly, only around half (55%) of charities reported that cyber security was a fairly or very high priority in their organisation.

The warning comes ahead of Charity Fraud Awareness Week, which begins on 17th October 2022. The campaign raises awareness of fraud and cybercrime and brings the charity sector together to share knowledge, expertise and good practice. It is run by the Charity Commission and the Fraud Advisory Panel and a partnership of charities, NGOs, regulators, law enforcers, and other not-for-profit stakeholders.

The Charity Commission's new survey explored charities' experiences of online cyber-attack. It found that over half of charities (51%) held electronic records on their customers, while 37% enabled people to donate online. A greater digital footprint increases a charity's vulnerability. The most common types of attacks experienced were phishing and impersonation (where others impersonate the organization in emails or online). For both attacks personal data is often at risk.

There are lots of simple steps that can be taken to protect against cyber harms including changing passwords regularly, using strong passwords and two factor authentication, updating training and policies, making back-ups of your data using the cloud and making sure antivirus and all other software is patched to the latest version. Many useful tools and resources will be available to help charities reduce their vulnerability to these crimes throughout Charity Fraud Awareness Week.

The survey also confirmed that there is an under-reporting of incidents when they do occur, with only a third (34%) of affected charities reporting breaches. It's important that charities get in touch with the Commission where there has been a serious incident, even where there may be no regulatory role for the Commission. This helps the regulator to identify trends and patterns and help prevent others from falling victim to fraud.

Amie McWilliam-Reynolds, Assistant Director Intelligence and Tasking, from the Charity Commission said:

Online financial transactions, and online working generally, present a great opportunity for charities – whether in engaging supporters, raising funds, and streamlining their operations. This was demonstrated in particular during the pandemic, when the longer-term move away from cash to online fundraising accelerated. But online financial transactions and the collection and storage of personal data also harbour risk, and we are concerned that some charities may be underestimating that risk, and are therefore exposing their charity to potential fraud.

We hope that projects like Charity Fraud Awareness Week help raise awareness among trustees and charity staff of the risks they may face, and of the advice and guidance available to support them in protecting their charity from fraud.

She added:

Preventing and tackling fraud is not a 'nice to have'. It is vital that every penny given to charity makes a positive difference, especially during these straitened times, when donors, charities, and those they support face mounting financial pressures.

Sir David Green CB KC from the Fraud Advisory Panel said:

Fraud is the UK's most commonly experienced crime and much of it is committed online. Therefore, it is essential that charities take the security of their systems, information, people and money seriously. Simple cyber security measures can make a big difference which is why we've collaborated with UK police forces to offer a series of free cyber-security focussed events during this year's awareness week." Charity Fraud Awareness Week 2022 will feature online events, talks and useful advice from anti-fraud experts, designed to help the third sector and charitable organisations tackle the problem of fraud and cybercrime.

ENDS

Notes to editors:

1. Cyber security survey of charities, conducted by IFF Research. 2,330 in England and Wales responded (October 2022).
2. More information about Charity Fraud Awareness Week can be found on [their website](#).

National Drought Group forecasts drought may remain beyond spring 2023

Average rainfall levels over winter will still not be sufficient to avoid impending drought or drought conditions next year, the National Drought Group has forecast.

At a meeting today (14 October), chaired by Environment Agency Chief Executive Sir James Bevan, members discussed projections for a dry autumn and winter on the water, agriculture and environment sectors in 2023. Many water companies have suggested impending drought or drought conditions will remain beyond spring in some areas– notably in parts of the South West, South East, East and Yorkshire and East Midlands – if rainfall is below average.

The group, made up of senior decision-makers from the Environment Agency, government, water companies and key farming and environmental groups, also discussed actions needed over the next six months to sustain essential water supplies in preparation for spring/summer next year. This will include water companies implementing their drought plans and accelerating infrastructure plans to improve resilience of water supplies. Amongst other actions, the Environment Agency will manage water abstraction licences, take decisions on drought permits and operating its water transfer schemes.

NDG members heard that:

- Water companies expect water resources to recover to either normal or recovering conditions by spring if we receive average rainfall – but several companies forecast that some supply areas will still remain in drought or impending drought conditions.
- The lack of moisture in soils led to significant agricultural impacts and reduced water availability for farmers this year. Winter refill of farm storage reservoirs may be constrained if there is below average rainfall this winter
- Even with typical rainfall over winter, we could still see environmental impacts in 2023 due to a lag in the environmental response to the dry weather. These include impacts on fish populations, and a higher number of environmental incidents such as fish rescues being needed as a result of lower river flows.
- All sectors must plan for all scenarios, continue using water wisely and maximise access to water for all sectors and the environment.

Projections were presented by the Environment Agency on behalf of contributing NDG members such as the water companies, the NFU and Canal and Rivers Trust.

Alongside this, the latest monthly national [water situation report](#), published by the EA today, shows that for the first time in six months, September rainfall across England as a whole reached average levels. However, due to soils remaining drier than usual, this has made little or no difference to reservoir levels and most of the country remains in drought.

River and groundwater levels remain low and reservoir stocks continue to decrease at all the reservoirs the Environment Agency reports on.

Essential water supplies remain safe, but recent rainfall has not changed the underlying drought situation caused by the prolonged dry weather of the last several months.

EA Chief Executive and NDG chair, Sir James Bevan said:

“Our lives, livelihoods and nature all depend on one thing – water. Climate change and population growth mean we need to take action now to ensure we have enough over the coming decades to manage everyday supplies, and more intense drought events.

“We have a plan to do that and delivering it will require all of us to work together – government, water companies, regulators, farmers and businesses, and each of us as individuals. The Environment Agency is determined to do its part.”

Water Minister Trudy Harrison said:

“The record-breaking temperatures, unusually low rainfall and widespread drought the country has experienced this year are a reminder that we need to adapt to ensure our water supplies are resilient and secure in future.

“The work of the National Drought Group is ensuring that we can manage down the risk of continuing drought conditions, so that the impact is less severe for all of us.”

In addition to the actions already being taken by the Environment Agency to manage the impacts of the drought, it has recently approved the following water company drought permits:

- A drought permit for South West Water to manage the abstraction of water from the Tamar Lakes in Cornwall;
- A drought permit for South East Water to manage the abstraction of water from the Ardingly (River Ouse) reservoir.

The following drought permits have recently been submitted to the Environment Agency by water companies:

- Yorkshire Water has applied for drought permits to conserve water by reducing the flows out of the North West group of reservoirs;

- Thames Water has applied for a drought permit to manage the abstraction of water from the River Thames to help refill Farmoor reservoir;
- Thames has applied for two further drought permits to manage the abstraction of water from groundwater at Baunton and Meysey Hampton;
- Severn Trent has applied for a drought permit for reservoirs in Derwent Valley.

Ensuring long term water security

The NDG's projections place more focus than ever on the actions that must be taken now to enhance resilience to dry periods and the Environment Agency is redoubling its efforts to secure long term water security.

The National Framework for Water Resources (NFWR), launched by the Environment Agency in 2020 and agreed with the other regulators, the government and the water companies, sets out the scale of action needed to ensure resilient supplies and an improved water environment.

The NDG noted that many of the actions needed to ensure long term water security, notably the investment in new water infrastructure, will also play an important part in driving growth for the country as a whole. Members identified a set of actions to help accelerate delivery of that infrastructure and the water security it will help to ensure.

The NDG will meet again later this autumn to assess the latest position and take further action as necessary.

Further information:

Attendees at today's NDG meeting:

- AHDB
- Angling Trust
- Cabinet Office
- CLA
- Canal and River Trust
- Consumer Council for Water
- DLUHC
- Defra
- DWI
- Environment Agency
- HTA
- Met Office
- MOSL
- National Farmers Union
- Ofwat
- UKHSA
- Natural England
- Water UK
- Welsh Government
- UKWRC
- National Framework WR Steering group

- Water companies
- Affinity Water
- Anglian Water
- Bristol Water
- DCWW
- Northumbria Water
- Portsmouth Water
- SES
- Severn Trent
- Southern Water
- South East Water
- South Staffs Water
- South West Water
- Thames Water
- United Utilities
- Yorkshire Water
- Wessex Water

Upgraded Materials Research Facility empowers fusion research

The UK Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA) has completed a £10m extension of its world-leading Materials Research Facility (MRF) at Culham Science Centre in Oxfordshire.

Specialist materials that can withstand extreme conditions are a critical part of delivering fusion energy as a safe, sustainable, low carbon energy supply. They are also essential in the development of STEP (Spherical Tokamak for Energy Production), the UK's prototype fusion powerplant targeting operations by 2040.

The new investment has doubled the MRF size, providing an additional 12 shielded research rooms, used to hold high-end analytical instrumentation, as well as extensive new active chemical laboratory space, for scientists and engineers to develop more neutron tolerant materials.

Amanda Quadling, UKAEA's MRF Director, said ahead of today's official opening:

"Developing novel materials for resilience to fusion's triple whammy of tritium permeation, transmutation and atomic displacement effects is one of the grand challenges in delivering fusion power to the grid by mid-century.

"We're really proud of our extended MRF facility, which is one of the best of its kind in the world and provides collaborative space to bring together academic and industrial researchers. Also, by co-locating experimentalists

and modellers, we hope to incubate new approaches to materials qualification for fusion.”

Supported by the UK government’s National Nuclear User Facility (NNUF) and Fusion Foundations programme, the MRF is also part of the Henry Royce Institute for Advanced Materials and bridges the gap between university and nuclear licenced site laboratories.

UKAEA staff provide users with support in sample preparation and analysis, as well as logistics advice for the transport of active materials. Focus is on the development of new analytical techniques specific to fusion materials, as well as the output of engineering-relevant data for powerplant design engineers and regulators.

The MRF extension doubles the current capacity for internationally leading equipment, enables air-lock truck deliveries to the operational areas and has more office accommodation.

Find out more about using the MRF and how to apply for access: mrf.ukaea.uk

[Seagrass and saltmarsh habitat development](#)

New mapping tools from the Environment Agency and Natural England which reveal the extent of seagrass and saltmarsh habitats around England for the first time, are now live.

The maps will provide valuable information for the management of these crucial blue carbon habitats, helping to drive forward restoration projects.

Saltmarsh and seagrass habitats are vital to support ocean recovery and fight the impacts of climate change by protecting important marine biodiversity and capturing and storing carbon. They provide a wealth of benefits for people and wildlife, including acting as a flood defence, improving water quality, and providing a place for recreation. They are also key habitats for breeding and feeding birds, many of them migratory, as well as nursery sites for a range of commercial fish and marine invertebrate species.

To help protect and expand these habitats, the Environment Agency recently published its saltmarsh inventory and accompanying [report](#), mapping where saltmarsh has been gained and lost over a ten year period. The data revealed a 7% increase in saltmarsh extent around the English coast. This takes the total habitat to over 350km squared, with saltmarsh restoration projects contributing 37% of this gain.

A brand new [national seagrass map](#) has also been published by Natural England

and the Environment which identifies where intertidal and subtidal seagrass habitats have been surveyed in England and draws on historic data to reveal how seagrass extent has changed over time.

Roger Proudfoot, Estuaries and Coasts Planning Manager at the Environment Agency, said:

These new maps help us understand the threats to these important habitats, providing a baseline for seagrass and showing how saltmarshes are changing which helps inform us on actions we can take to protect and restore them.

Both saltmarsh and seagrass are an important part of the Environment Agency's work to tackle climate change and the biodiversity crisis; improve water quality; and in promoting green growth for a sustainable future.

A number of coastal habitat restoration schemes are already underway, including the [LIFE Recreation ReMEDIES](#) project led by Natural England, the largest seagrass restoration project in England which is restoring seagrass in Plymouth Sound and the Solent.

Jonathan Burney, Director of Strategy & Government Advice (Marine) at Natural England, said:

Seagrasses are a vital part of our marine ecosystem and bring a range of benefits for people and nature, including providing an important habitat for wildlife, enhancing water quality and capturing and storing carbon”.

We are undertaking England's largest seagrass planting project to restore our precious marine environment, and this new map will be a pivotal tool to progress more seagrass restoration projects around the UK”.

Elsewhere, the [Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund](#), coordinated by the Environment Agency, is supporting three restoration projects with the aim of enabling them to attract private sector funding. These include the Biosphere Foundation, who are aiming to deliver saltmarsh restoration using finance raised from carbon credit sales, and Plymouth City Council who are developing a develop a pilot seagrass carbon code to attract investment. Saltmarsh and seagrass are also two of the estuarine and coastal habitats being prioritised by the [Restoring Meadow, Marsh and Reef \(ReMeMaRe\)](#) habitat restoration initiative.

The maps follow the publication of two free handbooks providing practical advice to local authorities, community partnerships and environmental organisations on restoring and creating estuarine and coastal habitats.

Government announces cutting-edge new telecoms lab for Solihull

- New research for Birmingham Tech Week shows West Midlands is one of the UK's fastest growing tech sectors – valued at £15.3 billion, up from £11.5 billion in 2021
- Hiring by Birmingham tech firms is up by a fifth in 2022 and a third across the West Midlands, with over 2,300 startups and scaleups in the region

A new state-of-the-art UK Telecommunications Lab will be based in Solihull, creating dozens of high-skilled jobs for the region, Tech Minister Damian Collins has announced today.

The first of its kind in the country, the Lab will act as a secure research facility bringing together telecom operators, suppliers and academics to research and test innovative new ways of boosting the security, resilience and performance of the UK's mobile networks. It will help close the digital skills gap locally as well as nationally by creating dozens of specialised jobs in telecoms and cyber security.

New research out today, which has been commissioned by the government for Birmingham Tech Week, also shows a large increase in the number of tech startups and scaleups across Birmingham and the West Midlands.

There has been a 21.3 per cent increase in tech jobs in Birmingham in the seven months to July 2022, rising to 31 per cent across the West Midlands region, according to analysis by smarter job search engine [Adzuna](#) for the UK's Digital Economy Council.

There are now over 144,000 people employed in tech startups and scaleups across the West Midlands, with over 56,000 in Birmingham alone. The boost to hiring follows a sharp increase in the value of West Midlands tech companies, with the region's tech ecosystem now valued at £15.3 billion, up from £11.5 billion in 2021, according to new data from Dealroom.

The analysis shows the West Midlands has become one of the UK's biggest digital sectors – with health, transport and sports tech companies flourishing in particular. Since 2020, West Midlands tech companies have raised over £850 million in venture capital funding.

Tech Minister Damian Collins said:

After this summer's stunning Commonwealth Games it is great to feel the buzz in the city yet again in Birmingham Tech Week.

Fast-growing firms are cementing Birmingham's status as a tech

powerhouse – boosting jobs and spreading economic growth right across the West Midlands.

As a result, there is no better home for the new UK Telecoms Lab, which will turn the region into a centre for expertise and innovation in the security of next-generation mobile networks.

New cutting-edge telecoms test lab

The ever-increasing speed and reliability of mobile and broadband networks has supercharged the UK's economy, but it also means we are more dependent on telecoms infrastructure.

As the demand for 5G grows and next-generation 6G is on the horizon, having a new national research facility in one location will enable telecom companies and suppliers to test their equipment – such as radio network infrastructure and the software which underpins it – in a realistic environment.

The UK Telecoms Lab will help get faster mobile technology rolled out quicker and ensure people can continue to have full confidence in UK networks by identifying national security risks and vulnerabilities and ensuring vital equipment and software are protected against cyber attacks.

The lab will help new businesses enter the UK telecoms market by testing to ensure equipment is fully 'interoperable', meaning it can connect to kit supplied by different manufacturers, which is increasingly important to the government's £250 million strategy to diversify the UK 5G telecoms market.

The Lab will be based in the Metropolitan Borough of Solihull. The government will announce further details about the Lab in due course.

Andy Street, Mayor of the West Midlands, said:

Tech is one of the most exciting and fastest growing sectors in our region. This fantastic announcement that Solihull will be the home of the new UK Telecoms Lab yet again underlines the strength of this important sector for us here in the West Midlands. The Lab will bring a wide range of stakeholders together to drive innovation and create high quality new jobs for local people.

As we mark Birmingham Tech Week, it's a great time to remember that we are at the cutting edge and – with our tech sector already valued at over £15 billion – we have an exciting future ahead of us.