

Progress made but too many water companies still falling short

The Environment Agency has today (13 July) released its [annual report](#) on the environmental performance of England's nine water and sewerage companies.

Whilst there were improvements in 2020, no single company achieved all the expectations for the period 2015 to 2020. These included the reduction of total pollution incidents by at least one-third compared with 2012 and for incident self-reporting to be at least 75%.

The sector coped well with Covid-19 pressures in 2020 and recently committed over [£850m to help contribute to a green recovery](#) from the pandemic. However, a number of companies are still failing to live up to their responsibilities to regulators, their customers and the environment.

Since 2011 the EA has used the Environmental Performance Assessment (EPA), which rates each company in England from 1 star to 4 star, for performance on environmental commitments such as pollution incidents and treatment work compliance. Where these commitments are not achieved, companies will face underperformance penalties, with Ofwat having new powers to levy fines from 2020.

The report shows:

- Southern Water and South West Water were rated as 2 star (requiring improvement)
- Anglian Water and Thames Water were rated as 3 star (good)
- Five companies (Northumbrian Water, Severn Trent Water, United Utilities, Wessex Water and Yorkshire Water) achieved 4 stars, although certain improvements are still required
- 2015-2020 expectations, including full compliance for waste water discharge permits and a 50% reduction in serious pollution incidents compared with 2012, have not been met
- Severn Trent Water, United Utilities and Wessex Water sustained the highest level of performance for most of the last five years

Serious pollution incidents declined for the second year in a row to the lowest number ever – but while there were 285 fewer total pollution incidents than in 2019, it was still the second highest number of total incidents since 2015.

Southern Water and South West Water both performed significantly below target for this metric, Southern Water for the second year in a row and South West Water for the tenth year in the row. Both companies' performances have been consistently unacceptable. Over half of serious incidents were also due to Anglian Water and Thames Water.

The results come the week after Southern Water was sentenced to pay a [record-](#)

[breaking £90m fine](#) after pleading guilty in court to 6971 unpermitted pollution discharges. The successful Environment Agency investigation was the biggest the regulator has ever conducted, making clear that polluters will be made to pay for damage to the environment. Earlier this year Thames Water was also fined [£4 million](#) and [£2.3 million](#) for separate pollution incidents.

Environment Agency Chair Emma Howard Boyd said:

Over half the water sector is now achieving the highest industry rating, showing that clear targets and regulatory focus combined with investment in the environment delivers change in the water sector. But, some companies are still failing in their duty to the environment and there remains a tendency to reach for excuses rather than grasp the nettle. As last week's £90m fine for Southern Water showed, environmental laws must not be undermined.

I have been meeting water company chairs in the last few weeks to set out our expectations for them to redouble their efforts to improve or maintain their environmental performance, something which continues to be a priority for both customers and shareholders.

Environment Minister Rebecca Pow said:

Water companies have environmental responsibilities and they must realise them. They have a legal duty to avoid pollution to our rivers and other waterways.

This report which spans the last 12 months makes for extremely disappointing reading. Even the industry-leading water companies have more work to do, especially on the use of storm overflows.

Getting the basics right is critical for water companies and then they need to go further in playing their part in achieving a higher level of ambition for our precious water environment. On these grounds I will not hesitate to set higher expectations for both water companies and regulators to ensure a level of service that the people of this country and the environment deserve.

In light of the annual report results, Environment Agency Chair Emma Howard Boyd has already met all water company chairs, while Environment Secretary George Eustice and Environment Minister Rebecca Pow will be meeting Southern Water and South West Water respectively in the coming months.

Following enforcement action taken by Ofwat on Southern Water in 2018, the company has a package of undertakings to deliver, including steps to improve investment and performance at its wastewater treatment works and to increase transparency for customers about its environmental performance.

And as a result of South West Water's consistent poor performance on the EPA, the company has a bespoke performance commitment with Ofwat to ensure they are aiming to achieve and maintain 4-star status from 2023-2025.

Other action Defra and the Environment Agency are taking includes:

- The Storm Overflows Taskforce, set up in 2020, will continue to push forward its commitment to eliminate harm from storm overflows and increase monitoring and transparency from the companies. New legal duties on water companies have already been included in the [Environment Bill](#).
- Reviewing regulatory actions, such as inspections, audits and data checks, and continuing to challenge companies to address areas where performance needs to improve, including getting to the root cause of non-compliance and pollution incidents, with more targeted plans for issues including sewer blockages.

David Black, Interim Chief Executive at Ofwat said:

It's disappointing to see repeat poor performance from some companies who are failing to take their responsibilities seriously enough. Addressing environmental challenges remains a top priority for water companies and the performance of some companies falls well short of what customers expect. We are pleased to see the performance of the leading companies in the sector, which demonstrates what can be achieved with focus and attention.

A step-change in culture and commitment is required if the sector is to fundamentally change the way it delivers for customers and the environment. Our work with government, the Environment Agency and other stakeholders will continue to ensure we hold companies to account so that the environment is left in a better condition for generations to come.

[GCA Webinar – 29 July 2021](#)

News story

On 29 July at 2pm Mark White will be holding his second GCA webinar.



Join the webinar to hear about the results of the GCA survey, Mark's next steps and work with Code Compliance Officers.

There will be an opportunity to ask questions during the event, you can submit questions in advance either via the registration form or by contacting the GCA team at: enquiries@groceriescode.gov.uk

The webinar will take place on 29 July at 2pm and will last approximately 30 minutes.

[Book your place on the GCA Webinar](#)

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[UN Human Rights Council 47: UK statement for the introduction of the resolution on girls education](#)

Your Excellencies,

I am very pleased to present this critical resolution on girls' education, together with our partners, the United Arab Emirates. I want to thank delegations for their constructive engagement on the text of this resolution.

We all know that educating girls creates empowered women who can lift their communities out of poverty, grow their economies and shape the destinies of their countries. And the pandemic has set back this vital cause. We estimate approximately 11 million girls are at risk of never returning back to school. So we have got to redouble our efforts.

This is a major international priority for the United Kingdom and we have put it at the heart of our G7 Presidency. At last month's G7 summit, leaders focussed on new targets to get 40 million more girls into education, and 20

million more girls reading by the age of 10. This is a major step forwards to delivering the commitment to 12 years of quality education for all girls.

The resolution that we are presenting today calls on States to really get behind this ambition. It would mark the first time that at the UN, we have agreed a document recognising the importance of ensuring access to at least 12 years of quality education for all girls. And I am pleased that, at the time of recording this message, more than 60 states have already given their support.

The resolution calls on governments to address and eliminate the barriers that girls face in accessing quality education, things like child marriage, the lack of access to sexual and reproductive health services. So we should all get behind this effort, which will be absolutely crucial to delivering the Sustainable Development Goal 4 to “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.”

And I hope we will all also be supporting the work of the Global Partnership for Education, the largest global fund solely dedicated to transforming the education opportunities in low income countries. The UK will be hosting the Global Education Summit with Kenya later on this month to raise funds for this vital cause.

At the G7 the UK led by example, we put in the largest ever pledge we have ever made to the GPE of £430 million. And together with our G7 partners we agreed a total pledge of at least \$2 billion of funding over the next 5 years. So we call on others to make ambitious pledges as well, to back up the G7’s efforts, so that we can get towards the target of £5 billion over this period.

For the good of the next generation, it is time for the world to step up and deliver on girls’ education and I urge all Members of the Human Rights Council to really put their shoulders to the wheel and get behind this important resolution.

New megalab opens to bolster fight against COVID-19

- Lab will process and sequence thousands of COVID-19 tests a week and play indispensable role in responding to new variants of concern and future disease threats, while creating 1,500 skilled jobs for the area
- New UK Health Security Agency – led by Jenny Harries – today sets out priorities for coming months to manage virus and boost UK pandemic preparedness

The UK’s first testing megalab – the Rosalind Franklin laboratory in Royal

Leamington Spa has opened and will be processing hundreds of thousands of COVID-19 samples every day to rapidly detect new variants and help stop the spread of the virus.

As part of the UK's NHS Test and Trace network, the laboratory is the biggest of its kind in the UK and will use cutting-edge technology to process even more tests and adopt the pioneering new genotype assay testing to quickly identify variants of concern and new mutations. This will help the UK's disease detectives take action to suppress outbreaks as society reopens, using tools such as surge testing.

The new state-of-the-art laboratory is at the heart of the UK Health Security Agency's (UKHSA) plans for the next part of our battle against the pandemic. In recognition of her outstanding contribution to our current understanding of genomic sequencing – one of our weapons in the fight against COVID-19 – the laboratory is named after Rosalind Franklin.

The Rosalind Franklin Laboratory aims to create and upskill scientists with a programme of training and, with close links to universities, inspiring a new generation to choose a career in STEM. The new laboratory will create up to 1,500 jobs when fully staffed, with over 300 people on-boarded already and over 700 more joining in the near future. Around 60% of the staff hired so far coming from within 30 miles of the site.

Under the leadership of former deputy Chief Medical Officer, Jenny Harries, the UKHSA's top priority is managing the spread of COVID-19 as restrictions ease, and building the UK's capabilities to ensure we are prepared against other potential future threats.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

The UK Health Security Agency is going to put us at the forefront of the global battle against COVID-19 and help us stay a step ahead of new and emerging future threats.

Trailblazing technologies are going to be pivotal to delivering on this bold ambition and I'm delighted that today we are bolstering our capabilities in testing and genomic sequencing with the opening of the Rosalind Franklin Laboratory.

This Laboratory will be one of the centrepieces of our efforts to manage this virus in the future, processing hundreds of thousands of positive COVID-19 tests a day to help us stop cases becoming outbreaks.

Testing has already been instrumental in helping us control the

virus and it is going to be essential to continue to protect ourselves and our communities in the months ahead. I'd urge everyone to take up our offer of free, twice weekly rapid testing.

Over the past year the government has built the largest network of diagnostic testing facilities in British history, including public and private sector partnerships, at incredible speed.

More than 200 million COVID-19 tests have been conducted, including over 100 million PCR tests which has enabled over 4.8 million positive cases to be contacted and told to self-isolate by NHS Test and trace. This testing network will continue to provide essential public health data for the UKHSA to tackle current and future infectious disease threats.

The publicly-owned, very high throughput laboratory is going to use cutting-edge technology, such as automation and top of the range robotics. This includes LGC EndPoint PCR (EPCR) testing workflow for COVID-19, which has ultra-high capacity and can process up to 150,000 tests each day on a single instrument. This will allow more tests to be processed more quickly and at a lower cost, and establishing a flexible pandemic response infrastructure that can respond to surges in demand.

In the coming months, the laboratory will carry out genotype assay testing, using ePCR machines to rapidly detect COVID-19 mutations indicating whether positive test samples contain known variants, and genome sequencing to confirm known variants and identify any new mutations.

The strength of the UK's genomics science base and diagnostics sequencing industry has allowed the UK to genomically sequence over 600,000 positive COVID-19 tests, rapidly identifying COVID-19 variants and capturing critical data, enabling scientists to track and stay ahead of mutations in the genome of the virus.

Chief Executive of the UKHSA Jenny Harries said:

Our mission at the UK Health Security Agency is to learn the lessons of this global pandemic and positively harness them in how we prepare and steel ourselves against future health threats.

The pandemic has provided us with clear evidence, on a daily basis, that you can only challenge viruses of this kind with the right testing and genomics infrastructure in place.

The Rosalind Franklin Laboratory is going to be a critical scientific addition to how we manage this virus in the months ahead, arming us with data and intelligence on the spread of variants that will inform decision-making and ultimately, save

lives.

UKHSA will bring together world-leading public health science, cutting-edge capabilities in data analytics and genomic surveillance and, at-scale testing and contact tracing to look at all possible health hazards. Today the Agency's remit letter has been published – outlining the government's priorities for the newly established public health body for the months ahead.

It will play a crucial role in global health security, providing public health leadership at international, national and local levels and working to reduce health inequalities.

As well the UKHSA will lead to collaboration at a global level, as a leading voice to protect the public's health from all external threats, with the Rosalind Franklin Laboratory a shining example of what can be achieved when there is collaboration across the public sector, academia and industry.

- The UKHSA will become operational in October and its priorities will continue to evolve adjusting the balance of its effort and capabilities between COVID-19 and other health security priorities.
 - Key strands of work for the UKHSA will include:
 - Developing surveillance and modelling capabilities to inform action at national and local levels to protect the country's health;
 - Increasing the country's world-leading genomic capabilities to respond rapidly to emerging threats through establishment of a New Variant Assessment Platform;
 - Supporting and delivering clinical guidance & communications tailored to the needs of different populations and areas;
 - Providing agile testing services at scale with rapid and effective contact tracing services, working in partnership with local authorities.
 - Domestic work for the UKHSA will include:
 - Immunisations: supporting delivery of measures outlined in the DHSC Vaccines strategy;
 - Antimicrobial Resistance: supporting the Government's goal to slow the growth of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) through delivery of the UK action plan for AMR 2019-2024;
 - Sexual Health: Providing scientific expertise to inform the development of the government's Sexual and Reproductive Health Strategy and support the commitment to eliminate HIV transmission by 2030;
 - Environmental Harms: Supporting the cross-government Clean Air Strategy by leading a national programme of communications work.
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[UKHSA priorities in 2021 to 2022](#)

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