

Coronavirus: Environment Agency update

We are aware communities, businesses and the environment rely on our services. This includes the advice and guidance we offer, our regulatory work which continues to protect the environment, people and wildlife from harm, managing the risks of flooding and coastal erosion, and other roles.

We will continue to review the situation in light of further advice from the government and will update you accordingly. In the meantime, we remind you to check the government's guidance at www.gov.uk/coronavirus.

Our staff

We remain fully operational, with the majority of our staff working from home. Our remaining frontline teams will be active, where necessary, on the ground tackling priority issues such as flood risk and pollution. All staff, wherever they are working, are following PHE guidance to reduce their risk of either transmitting or contracting coronavirus.

Maintaining, operating and repairing our assets is essential to ensure they work when required. Our work will continue where it remains safe to do so and activities comply with PHE advice.

We are also ensuring our contractors are aware of site and people restrictions and are following the correct procedures.

Offices

The Environment Agency closed most of its offices in March 2020. We continue to reopen our offices at a reduced capacity, in line with our health and safety plans.

To check the status of your local office contact enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk

Our flood defence work

Our flood defence work continues in line with PHE guidance and where it is safe. We are ready to respond to flooding. During coronavirus we continue to maintain and operate our flood and coastal defences to ensure they protect people and property from flooding. We're also maintaining our assets that support public water supply, industry, infrastructure, food production and the environment.

Where work continues, we have ensured that everyone involved has been trained on social distancing and will not put anyone at risk. If the work cannot be done safely, the work will stop.

We are also still carrying out inspections and repairs to flood defences damaged by spring storms. We are prioritising our work that has the most impact in terms of protecting lives and livelihoods, including prioritising

the most at-risk communities so they can remain resilient. If repairs to major infrastructure assets are disrupted by the impact of coronavirus, we will where possible put in place temporary mitigation for the risk, pending a full repair.

All our work is impacted by the controls we and government have put in place. This is likely to mean that completion dates for new projects will slip and other key activities may take place at less regular intervals. We are keeping communities informed of any delays and the action that we are taking to minimise them.

Flood warning service

Continuing to protect lives and livelihoods through our flood warning service remains fundamental to our work as the nation continues to deal with the effects of coronavirus. In order to protect our flood warning service during this difficult time, we have made some minor changes to the service.

In order to safeguard this essential service we will be focussing on the most important warnings, where flooding is expected or where there is a risk to life. We will continue to issue our lowest level of flood warnings – flood alerts – where there is a need to take action but will temporarily stop issuing them where they indicate that there is a very low likelihood of flooding taking place. Our teams will continue to work around the clock to ensure that people have the early warning and safety advice they need to stay safe.

Our regulatory role

Our frontline staff have returned to near normal regulatory work, such as compliance and enforcement.

Physical inspections remain a key part of regulation, but we also gather intelligence remotely, analyse data and assess performance. Used together, these activities provide us with a comprehensive picture from which we can assess regulatory compliance.

We have clearly set out our [approach to regulation and enforcement](#) during the coronavirus outbreak, and have published a series of temporary [regulatory position statements \(RPSs\)](#).

RPSs are nationally-applicable public statements that, provided certain circumstances and conditions are met, allow specified activity to be carried out without complying with a particular regulatory requirement. RPSs allow a degree of flexibility while still ensuring regulatory standards are maintained to protect people and the environment. They include clear conditions regarding standards that must be adhered to.

We have recently reviewed the ongoing need for the remaining COVID-19 RPSs. Some have been extended or replaced with new RPSs and some have now expired. Anyone using a COVID-19 RPS is responsible for [checking their status](#).

We will continue to review the need for RPSs over the autumn and winter and

will consider reinstating previously expired RPSs should the need arise.

Across the country, our teams continue to undertake investigations into environmental offending and prepare legal cases. We will consider the appropriate regulatory response to any unavoidable non-compliance in accordance with our [policies and guidance on regulation and enforcement](#).

Coronavirus is not an excuse to operate illegally. We make clear in our approach to regulation and enforcement during the coronavirus that we expect operators to take all reasonable steps to comply with regulatory requirements using contingency plans to help them comply.

We're also continuing to work with the police to share intelligence about criminal activity and take action against those breaking the law.

We absolutely recognise the added financial strain coronavirus is putting on businesses and have written to all our customers to invite them to contact us to discuss payment options if they experience difficulties.

Applying for a permit

Permitting remains a business critical activity. We have robust plans in place which will enable us to respond to any capacity or workload issues emerging from either the pandemic or the UK's exit from the EU. For example, we have retained access to additional permitting capacity should it be required.

Overall Permitting Service performance has continued to improve and stabilise since September and the amount of work in our queues is now at typical levels for our service.

Our priority is to sustain our improved performance and implement improvements to our processes that result in quicker determinations of permits in 2021.

Bathing water sampling

The Environment Agency has resumed sampling at designated bathing waters in July following government advice on easing lockdown restrictions.

Routine bathing water sampling was suspended before the start of the 2020 bathing season as the Environment Agency followed government guidelines to reduce the spread of coronavirus.

Throughout lockdown, regulatory work has continued to maintain the quality of bathing waters, which remains of a high standard in England.

The latest classifications for all designated bathing waters in England can be found [on our water quality website](#).

Our daily pollution risk forecasting service, which is the best way for bathers to get the latest information on water quality, has been providing updates throughout lockdown. This year the system has been upgraded to

provide even more accurate forecasts of when a temporary reduction in water quality is likely. For information on pollution risk forecasts and warnings [visit our website](#).

Angling and our fisheries

In line with government guidance, the Environment Agency had to pause a number of non-critical field based fisheries activities such as improving habitats for fish, facilities for anglers and restocking. Following the further easing of lockdown restrictions, we have restarted this field based fisheries work, including fisheries enforcement, to help protect and maintain fisheries and the environment.

We continue to prioritise our response to reported incidents of harm to the environment, subject to local conditions. Illegal fishing, pollution and incidents that harm the environment should be reported to our 24-hour hotline on 0800 80 70 60.

Our waterways

All navigation on our waterways should be limited to essential travel only. Travel on waterways and overnight stays are only permitted where the boat is your permanent residence or it is necessary for work, education or similar reasons. Those who live aboard their boats should limit their travel to access essential services and facilities. You should stay local where possible.

We will continue to support this national effort through these challenging times and will, as always, make protecting the safety of our customers and staff our top priority. Our staff will continue to work, managing and maintaining our waterways within the safe ways of working we have implemented over the past year. This may include some asset closures for maintenance. Our level of service may also be affected due to some staff who are vulnerable and need to shield. This means some tasks may not be carried out, including assisted passage at some locks, however wherever possible we will maintain essential services and facilities for those boaters who live aboard and who have to make essential journeys.

As in previous lockdowns, some activities using unpowered boats are permitted as part of your daily exercise, limited to once a day and within the [Government guidance for exercise](#). Please check Government guidance and any specific guidance from national governing bodies, such as British Canoeing or British Rowing.

Water safety

As the government eases restrictions on movement caused by the coronavirus outbreak, the public has been warned to keep safe around rivers and canals. For advice about the dangers of wild swimming, follow guidance from police, [Public Health England](#), the [Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents](#), and the [Royal National Lifeboat Institution](#). Their messages are clear: vigilance can save lives, and water-related accidents can be avoided by knowing how to

stay safe.

The Environment Agency, which manages many locks, weirs and bridges across England, wants people to remember the hazards under the water in rivers while spending time with friends and family. People should not to jump or dive into water and stay away from weirs, locks and pipes. There can be unseen hazards in the water, cold-water shock can affect even strong swimmers on warm days and social distancing must be continued to protect the public, staff and boaters. Keep a look out for boat traffic. Boaters, especially on larger vessels, can find it very hard to spot swimmers.

Restarting your private sewage treatment plant

We have provided guidance to a range of industry bodies covering hospitality businesses including pubs, restaurants, hotels, camping and caravan sites and theme parks confirming the need for private sewage treatment plants to be made ready to be used again following a period of shutdown or low flows.

It comes as many pubs and other hospitality businesses re-open.

Sewage treatment plants use living microorganisms in biological treatment processes to remove pollutants from sewage effluent before it is discharged into the environment. The sudden restart of a sewage treatment plant or an increase of flows into it following a relaxation of COVID-19 business shutdown rules will very likely result in the discharge of poor quality effluent unless steps are taken by operators of sewage treatment plants to prepare them for increased flows beforehand.

Environmental impacts must be minimised when operators restart their sewage treatment plants. Those who discharge poor quality effluent risk being in breach of their environmental permits or the General Binding Rules if their discharges cause pollution of surface water or groundwater.

Operators need to take steps to ensure that their treatment plant is able to operate effectively as flows into it increase after their businesses reopen.

Those unaccustomed to restarting, should seek technical advice and support from:

- whoever normally maintains their sewage treatment plant
- the manufacturer or supplier of their treatment plant
- a competent sewage treatment plant maintenance engineer

As well as ensuring that their sewage treatment plant is ready to receive increased flows, operators must also check that any pre-treatment equipment such as fats, oils and grease (FOG) traps are ready to be used again. Operators should also avoid sending excessive amounts of chemicals and cleaning products to their sewage treatment plant as they can inhibit and harm biological treatment processes. They should also ensure any contaminated drainage from washing and cleaning does not drain to surface water sewers, water courses or groundwater or cause pollution.

Operators of premises served by their own sewage treatment plant wanting to

dispose of waste beer should find other means of disposal. They should seek further guidance from the British Beer and Pub Association and refer to the waste hierarchy which is available on GOV.UK.

Billing

The Environment Agency recognises that some customers will be particularly affected by the measures to restrict the impact of the virus. We will consider requests for payment plans if customers experience difficulties paying bills on time. Income from fees and charges ensures the Environment Agency can continue to provide an appropriate level of regulation and services for our customers to ensure the environment and people are protected.

Customer contacts

During this pandemic the Environment Agency continues to protect people and the environment, working alongside our partners. Please report any pollution incidents on 0800 80 70 60 and stay #floodaware.

General enquiries

National Customer Contact Centre

Email: enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk

Telephone: 03708 506 506

P0 Box 544 Rotherham S60 1BY United Kingdom

Commercial vehicle and trailer parts merger raises competition concerns

News story

Universal Components' purchase of 3G raises competition concerns in the wholesale supply of commercial vehicle and trailer parts, a CMA investigation has found.



Universal Components UK Limited (Universal Components), owned by TVS Europe Distribution Limited, and 3G Truck & Trailer Parts Ltd (3G) are 2 of the leading wholesalers offering a wide range of commercial vehicle and trailer part types in the UK.

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) is concerned that the loss of competition brought about by the merger could result in their customers – motor factors (local distributors) supplying independent garages and repairers in the UK – losing out as a result of higher prices and a poorer service.

Evidence obtained by the CMA during its Phase 1 investigation of the merger showed that the companies compete closely with each other to supply customers with commercial vehicle and trailer parts.

In particular, the merging companies' internal documents clearly showed that they are close rivals, and that they monitor each other when setting prices. Wholesale customers also expressed concerns about the impact of the deal and did not consider there to be sufficient alternatives to Universal Components and 3G.

Universal Components and 3G must now address the CMA's concerns within 5 working days. If they are unable to do so, the merger will be referred for an in-depth Phase 2 investigation.

For more information, visit the [TVS Europe Distribution Limited / 3G Truck & Trailer Parts merger inquiry web page](#).

For media enquiries, contact the CMA press office on 020 3738 6460 or press@cma.gov.uk.

Published 2 June 2020

Foreign Secretary statement to Parliament on Hong Kong

I would like to update the House on the situation in Hong Kong.

Mr Speaker, as all members will know, Hong Kong's historic success was built on its autonomy, its freedoms and the remarkable resourcefulness and determination of its people.

We have long admired their prosperity and their values, respected through China's own expression of the 'One Country, Two Systems' approach. An approach that China itself has long articulated and affirmed as the basis for its relations with Hong Kong.

The UK, through successive governments, has consistently respected and supported that model, as reflected both in China's Basic Law and also the Joint Declaration. Which is, as honourable members will know, the treaty agreed by the UK and China and registered with the United Nations, as part of the arrangements for the handover of Hong Kong that were made back in 1984.

So Mr Speaker, set against this Chinese framework and the historic context, on 22 May during a meeting of the National People's Congress, China considered a proposal for a national security law for Hong Kong.

Then on 28 May, the National People's Congress adopted this decision.

China's Foreign Minister, State Councillor Wang Yi, made clear that this legislation will seek to ban "treason, secession, sedition and subversion" and we expect it to be published in full shortly.

This proposed national security law undermines the 'One Country, Two Systems' framework that I have described, under which Hong Kong is guaranteed a high degree of autonomy with executive, legislative and independent judicial powers.

Mr Speaker, to be very clear and specific about this, the imposition of national security legislation on Hong Kong by the government in Beijing, rather than through Hong Kong's own institutions, lies in direct conflict with Article 23 of China's own Basic Law.

And it lies in direct conflict with China's international obligations freely assumed under the Joint Declaration.

The Basic Law is clear that there are only a limited number of areas in which Beijing can impose laws directly, such as for the purposes of defence and foreign affairs, or in exceptional circumstances in which the National People's Congress declares a state of war or a state of emergency.

So the proposed national security law, as it has been described, raises the prospect, in terms of the substance and the detail, of prosecution in Hong

Kong for political crimes, which would undermine the existing commitments to protect the rights and the freedoms of the people of Hong Kong, as set out in the Joint Declaration, but also as reflecting International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

And, finally, the proposals also include provision for the authorities in Hong Kong to report back to Beijing on progress in pursuing national security education of its people. A truly sobering prospect.

Mr Speaker, we have not yet seen the detailed, published text of the legislation.

But I can tell the House, that if legislation in these terms, is imposed by China on Hong Kong, it would violate China's own Basic Law.

It would up end China's 'One Country, Two Systems' paradigm.

And it would be a clear violation of China's international obligations, including those made specifically to the United Kingdom under the Joint Declaration.

Let me also be clear about the approach the United Kingdom intends to take.

We don't oppose Hong Kong passing its own national security law.

We do strongly oppose such an authoritarian law being imposed by China in breach of international law.

Mr Speaker, we are not seeking to intervene in China's internal affairs,

Only to hold China to its international commitments, just as China expects of the United Kingdom.

We don't seek to prevent China's rise.

Far from it, we welcome China as a leading member of the international community, and we look to engage with China on everything from trade to climate change.

And it is precisely because we recognise China's role in the world that we expect it to live up to the international obligations, and international responsibilities, that come with it.

So, Mr Speaker, on Thursday, working very closely with our partners in Australia, Canada and the United States, the UK released a joint statement expressing our deep concerns over this proposed new security legislation.

Our partners in New Zealand and Japan have issued similar statements.

And the EU has too, and I have had discussions with a various number of our EU partners.

So the UK stands firm with our international partners in our expectation that China live up to its international obligations under the Sino-British Joint

Declaration.

Mr Speaker, there is time for China to re-consider, there is a moment for China to step back from the brink and respect Hong Kong's autonomy and respect China's own international obligations.

We urge the Government of China to work with the people of Hong Kong, with the Hong Kong Government, to end the recent violence and to resolve the underlying tensions based on political dialogue.

But if China continues down this current path, if it enacts this national security law, we will consider what further response we make, working with those international partners and others.

Mr Speaker, I hope the whole House agrees that we, as the United Kingdom, have historic responsibilities, a duty I would say, to the people of Hong Kong.

So, I can tell the House now that if China enacts this law we will change the arrangements for British National Overseas passport-holders in Hong Kong.

The House will recall that BNO status was conferred on British Dependent Territories Citizens connected with Hong Kong as part of the package of arrangements that accompanied the Joint Declaration in 1984, in preparation for the handover of the territory.

And under that status, currently, BNO passport holders are already entitled to UK consular assistance in third countries.

And the British government also provides people with BN(0) passports visa-free entry into the UK for up to six months as visitors.

Mr Speaker, if China follows through with its proposed legislation, we will put in place new arrangements to allow BNOs to come to the UK without the current 6 month limit, enabling them to live and apply to study and work for extendable periods of 12 months, thereby also providing a pathway to citizenship.

Mr Speaker, let me just finish by saying that even at this stage I sincerely hope China will reconsider its approach.

But if not, the UK will not just look the other way when it comes to the people of Hong Kong.

We will stand by them, we will live up to our responsibilities.

And I commend this statement to the House.

Welsh winners of the 2020 Queen's Award for Voluntary Service announced

Four organisations from Wales have been awarded the prestigious Queen's Award for Voluntary Service this year.

The Roots Foundation Wales, Cymer Afan Community Library, Hands Around the World and Swansea Canal Society have received the highest award given to organisations delivering exceptional service within their communities.

Coinciding with Volunteers' Week (1-7 June), this year's Queen's Award for Voluntary Service celebrates the work of a fantastic, diverse range of volunteer groups whose work has enhanced and supported local communities over a number of years.

The Queen's Award offers a chance to highlight their outstanding contribution to society and also to recognise the crucial role many have played to support vulnerable people during the pandemic.

This year's recipients demonstrate the diversity of organisations supporting our communities and also their ability to innovate – many have been able to adapt their services in light of the coronavirus outbreak.

When a local food bank closed in Neath Port Talbot because its volunteers were self-isolating, the Cymer Afan Community Library quickly decided to repurpose their building, staff and volunteers and transform the library into a temporary food bank for the community.

The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service Independent Committee Chair Sir Martyn Lewis, said:

This year's Queen's Awards highlight the considerable achievements of groups of volunteers who have been making a real impact to the fabric of our country for many years – in some cases decades. Inspired by all that is best in the human spirit, they are made up of local people who have come together to address particular issues and problems facing their communities – often in new and imaginative ways.

All of these award winners have demonstrated a long-term commitment to volunteering that gives real meaning to society, and which shows Britain at its best. Moreover, some of them have also managed to provide valuable support with the fight against Covid-19. We owe them our gratitude – and our congratulations.

Secretary of State for Wales Simon Hart said:

These awards recognise the hours of hard work that volunteers and organisations across the UK put in to serve their communities and create a sense of local pride. This year's Welsh recipients are no exception, and in the current global pandemic their work in their communities is more valuable than ever.

Congratulations to the four Welsh recipients who all thoroughly deserve this award for the positive role they play in society.

Minister for Civil Society, Baroness Barran said:

This prestigious award recognises the important work being done by volunteers across the country and I'd like to congratulate all of the winners for their hard work and dedication supporting their communities.

Charities, social enterprises and their volunteers are the beating heart of our communities. In these challenging times, they have stepped up their response and been vital to the national effort, for which we are all grateful.

It is fantastic to win this award in recognition of the contribution our volunteers make to our local community – we are all delighted! This is a significantly disadvantaged area and we all work tirelessly to give people opportunities that would otherwise not be available here.

The recipients of the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service are announced every year on 2 June, the anniversary of The Queen's Coronation.

Any volunteer-led group comprising two or more people having a positive impact on the lives of others in an exceptional way can be nominated for an award. A group must satisfy the eligibility requirements before the nomination can be processed through to the assessment stages of the award. More details can be found on the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service website.

Nominations for the 2021 awards close on 25 September 2020.

[Find this year's winners near you on our map tool.](#)

New Trade Commissioners to Lead UK trade and investment overseas

- International Trade Secretary, Liz Truss, appoints three HM Trade Commissioners
- They will operate across China and Hong Kong, South Asia and Europe
- HM Trade Commissioners champion British trade around the world

International Trade Secretary, Liz Truss, has named three new HM Trade Commissioners (HMTCs). They will champion British trade with some of the UK's biggest economic partners as the Coronavirus crisis highlights just how important it is to keep trade flowing and supply chains open so we can all have the essential supplies we need.

CEO of the Commonwealth Enterprise & Investment Council, Alan Gemmell, has been appointed as HMTC for South Asia. Consul-General in Shanghai, John Edwards, becomes HMTC for China and Hong Kong. The previous HM Trade Commissioner for China, Richard Burn, has been appointed temporarily to the role of HMTC Europe.

International Trade Secretary, Liz Truss said:

By attracting inward investment and supporting UK businesses, our HM Trade Commissioners will play a key part in delivering free trade agreements that benefits every part of the UK.

It's fantastic to welcome Alan, John and Richard who are great champions of British trade and bring a wealth of knowledge and expertise to their new roles.

Permanent Secretary at the Department for International Trade, Antonia Romeo said:

I am delighted to welcome John, Alan and Richard to their new roles on the DIT leadership team. They all have proven expertise and experience in supporting British businesses to export and grow internationally, and attracting inward investment into the UK. At this time, this work is more important than ever.

£286 billion of goods and services were traded between the UK and Asian countries in 2019. The continent is also home to 6 of the top 20 fastest-growing economies in the world and the diverse and fast-growing economies of the region offer huge potential to UK business.

In 2019, the total trade in goods and services between the UK and South Asia was £30 billion, an increase of 9.9% or £2.7 billion compared to 2018; and

the total trade in goods and services between the UK and China and Hong Kong was £104.6 billion, an increase of 16% or £14.4 billion compared to 2018.

Speaking after his appointment, HMTC for South Asia, Alan Gemmell said:

I'm excited to return to South Asia as HM Trade Commissioner. The UK and South Asia share deep personal links and strong business connections.

I look forward to helping these relationships flourish with trade and investment at their heart.

John Edwards, HMTC for China and Hong Kong said:

Our bilateral trade with China and Hong Kong broke £100bn for the first time in 2019 with our exports to China growing faster than any other global region. Regions across the UK also continue to benefit from Chinese investment – more than any other country in Europe.

Richard Burn, HMTC for Europe, added:

All European countries will remain critically important trading partners for the UK, as we agree a new trading relationship with the EU.

The mission of DIT across the Europe region will be to help British businesses succeed in the new trading environment and to build an ambitious level of inward investment.

About HMTCs

All of the new HMTCs cooperate closely with HM Ambassadors and High Commissioners, the wider diplomatic network, and other HM Government colleagues based in countries in their region, in a joined-up and coordinated government effort overseas to promote UK trade and prosperity.

In total, there will be 9 geographical areas that the HM Trade Commissioners cover:

- Africa
- Asia-Pacific
- China
- Eastern Europe and Central Asia Network
- Europe
- Latin America
- Middle East
- North America

- South Asia