

Yorkshire Water fined £1.6M for sewage pollution

Yorkshire Water has been fined £1,600,750 for polluting a Bradford watercourse in a prosecution brought by the Environment Agency. It was also ordered to pay a victim surcharge of £170 and £22,112.79 in costs.

The company appeared at Leeds Magistrates' Court for sentence on Monday, 18 July, where it pleaded guilty to unauthorised sewage discharges into Bradford Beck, and breaches of its environmental permit.

The court heard its George Street detention tank in Bradford was full for up to eight months during 2018, leading to 25 unauthorised sewage spills into Bradford Beck.

The city centre tank collects and stores a mixture of rainfall and sewage from the sewer network during times of heavy rainfall. Once storm conditions have passed the tank operates its pumps to return the mixture back into the sewers. If it's a prolonged event and the tank fills to capacity, it's designed to overflow into the watercourse. When operating correctly the tank should be empty in dry weather.

Over two days in August 2018, the Environment Agency received four reports of sewage pollution in Bradford Beck. An officer attended and an investigation, combined with additional information from the community, led to a request for further data from Yorkshire Water. The investigation revealed one or both of the two pumps that emptied the tank were at various times not working between August 2017 and September 2018. The Environment Agency concluded the tank was full between January and August 2018, with spikes in the data showing the tank spilled 25 times.

Yorkshire Water was aware the storm pumps were out of action and of the fact the tank was full. It failed to fix the pumps as soon as practical, to provide a stand-by pump, to maintain its pumps and to maintain the overflow.

Information from the community suggested an impact on the wildlife, including invertebrates and fish in the immediate time after the August 2018 unauthorised discharge.

Bradford Beck at Ambler Mill, upstream of George Street

District Judge Kitson confirmed that Yorkshire Water knew from August 2017 that there were significant problems with the George Street Detention Tank and that it was 100% full from January 2018. He was satisfied Yorkshire Water knew the pumps were not in operation and had no means of pumping sewage back into the network. The Judge concluded that the company would have known a discharge into the tank would cause an unlawful discharge into the Beck. District Judge Kitson found that Yorkshire Water were reckless in this

offending due to the fact they were taking some steps but not with sufficient urgency.

Yorkshire Water in mitigation stated that Chief Executive, Nicola Shaw, was present in court because the company took its environmental responsibilities seriously. The company was remorseful and indicated remedial steps were taken to address the issues. It recognised it had failed to get a grip of the problem, but it had co-operated with the investigation.

Ben Hocking, Environment Manager for the Environment Agency in Yorkshire, said:

We take our responsibility to protect the environment very seriously. Water companies are aware that their activities have the potential to cause serious environmental impacts and they have a legal duty to avoid pollution. The regulations are clear.

Yorkshire Water was aware the tank was full and likely to illegally discharge into the beck and failed to take action to prevent it from happening. They undermined the permitting regulations, which are in place to protect the environment.

Our officers carried out a thorough investigation, with the support of the community, to put the facts before the court as part of our continuing commitment to hold water companies to account.