

Yorkshire Water pays for environmental damage

Yorkshire Water has agreed to pay £300,000 to Yorkshire Wildlife Trust after a sewage discharge led to pollution in Leeds in 2018.

The company breached its environmental permit due to an unauthorised sewage discharge from its Garforth Storm Tanks, which led to a pollution incident at Kippax Beck.

Yorkshire Water submitted an Enforcement Undertaking to the Environment Agency, which has now been accepted.

An Enforcement Undertaking is a voluntary offer made by companies and individuals to make amends for their offending.

Garforth Storm Tanks

Flows at Garforth Storm Tanks are managed by an automated valve, controlling and isolating the sewage. The tanks will fill during times of heavy rainfall.

If the valve fully closes, it means all sewage and rainfall are diverted to the storm tanks and an alarm alerts Yorkshire Water. Sewage levels in the storm tanks are then monitored using level sensors and alarms.

On 17 November 2018, the Environment Agency alerted Yorkshire Water to discoloured water in Kippax Beck. Enquiries by the company revealed the valve was fully closed. It meant the storm tanks had filled and were discharging into a nearby watercourse.

Neither the valve alarm or storm tank sewage level alarms had triggered, meaning the system had appeared to be operating as normal. The valve was manually opened to prevent any further discharge.

The impact was widespread and appeared to have affected the beck and its wildlife for 3.3km.

'Effective enforcement option'

Area Environment Manager, Ben Hocking, said:

When companies fail to meet their environmental obligations, it's a serious matter and we will take appropriate action, which may include civil sanctions.

Enforcement Undertakings are an effective enforcement option to allow companies to put things right and contribute to environmental improvements.

This payment of £300,000 to Yorkshire Wildlife Trust will bring great benefits to nature reserves in the local area.

The offer from Yorkshire Water details how it has also taken steps to make improvements, including replacing and repairing machinery and equipment, carrying out a review of alarms, and completing an environmental survey.

Yorkshire Wildlife Trust will use the donation to fund a series of projects at nature reserves in the Lower Aire valley.

Enforcement Undertakings are one of a number of enforcement options available to the Environment Agency.

Since 2015, the Environment Agency has secured water company court fines of over £137million. Most recently, Yorkshire Water was fined £233,000 at Leeds Crown Court on 28 January 2022 for a pollution incident at Tong Beck which happened in November 2017; and on 8 September 2021 they were fined £150,000 at Sheffield Magistrates' Court for a pollution incident at Potteric Carr Nature Reserve.