

EA secures £430k for charity after multiple pollution incidents

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Imerys Minerals Limited has paid £430,000 to the West Country Rivers Trust, to be used to restore water quality and improve fish migration.

The Environment Agency has secured £430,000 for West Country Rivers Trust from Imerys Minerals Limited, following six clay pollution incidents across a two-year period.

The money will be used to improve fish migration and engage local communities to monitor and champion river health.

Imerys made the offer after an Environment Agency investigation into the incidents.

In agreeing to the sanction, which is known as an enforcement undertaking and can be used as an alternative to a prosecution, Imerys has put in place robust measures to reduce the likelihood of similar pollution incident happening again.

This includes a review of operational procedures, installation of new equipment and a commitment to a 10-year pipeline replacement strategy.

Clay was released on the surrounding land during the incident near Goonamarris

The company will also cover the Environment Agency's investigation and enforcement costs of £22,600.

The six pollution incidents took place across Cornwall, in the St Austell area, between September 2021 and July 2023.

In one incident, an underground pipeline at Imerys' clay production plant in Cornwall near Goonamarris failed on 15 September 2021. Clay was released on the surrounding land as well as entering the Gwindra Stream, which then leads to the River Fal.

Imerys estimated that an equivalent weight of clay lost was 87.8 dry tonnes. Sampling suggested environmental impacts were still present two months after the incident.

An investigation found that the pipe fracture was likely caused by damage from machinery. Imerys believe that machinery had thinned and weakened the pipeline.

Clay entered the Gwindra Stream, which then leads to the River Fal

A second clay discharge to the Gwindra Stream took place in December 2022.

Other incidents included the failure of a buried pipeline joint causing a clay discharge into a stream, and a leaking joint at Imerys Maclarens tank site causing clay to flow into the River Fal.

Environment Agency Team Leader, Jack Hale, said:

This commitment allows Imerys to put things right in a way that directly benefits the

environment.

We are pleased that the money will go towards improving water quality and fish habitat in the area.

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Stephanie Knights, Head of River Restoration at the West Country Rivers Trust, said:

The River Fal catchment is an area of exceptional environmental value, yet it faces significant pressure from a legacy of mining and quarrying.

We are exploring fish passage solutions with the Environment Agency and habitat improvement opportunities, whilst pursuing research partnerships with the University of Exeter, and engaging local communities through our Citizen Science Investigations programme to monitor and champion river health.

Our focus is clear: restore fish passage, improve habitat and water quality, and build the long-term ecological resilience this river deserves.”

Background

What is an enforcement undertaking (EU)?

An EU is available to the Environment Agency as an alternative sanction to prosecution or monetary penalty for dealing with certain environmental offences.

It is a legally-binding voluntary agreement proposed by a business (or an individual) when the EA has reasonable grounds to suspect that an environmental offence has occurred.

EUs for environmental offences were introduced under the Environmental Civil Sanctions (England) Order 2010 and the Environmental Civil Sanctions (Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) Regulations 2010.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ea-secures-430k-for-charity-after-multiple-pollution-incidents>