

# Inspections target smashed with 10,000 health checks on water network

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## **Environment Agency completes record number of water company inspections driving improved performance across the sector.**

The Environment Agency today (Tuesday 31 March) has expanded its surveillance of the water network to record levels, completing over 10,000 inspections of water company assets in the last year.

The surge in checks on treatment works, sewage pumping stations and storm overflows marks a major step in ensuring better performance by water companies: identifying potential problems before they occur and taking robust action where breaches are identified.

This year, the EA's inspection teams uncovered over 3,000 permit condition breaches, where companies are failing to comply with environmental regulation. These findings led to real-world action with over 3000 individual demands for improvement issued to water companies, including repairing sewage works and upgrading infrastructure.

Deploying its largest-ever water enforcement workforce (with 500 additional staff for water regulation) and record funding, the Environment Agency's scrutiny of the sector has increased sharply, marking one of the many significant changes the organisation has undergone to deliver tougher regulation.

Water company behaviour is beginning to shift. 22% of site visits uncovered at least one issue - down from 25% the previous year - indicating that more diligent scrutiny of water company assets is pushing companies to maintain their assets more responsibly.

This step change in regulation reinforces the Environment Agency's determination to better tackle water pollution - and shows that increased inspections are already delivering results. The message from the regulator is clear: water companies must maintain their networks, fix problems when they appear and ensure the environment is protected.

This record number of inspections, up from 4,600 in 2024/25, has given the regulator the most comprehensive national picture of water company performance. More staff, better data, and increased powers mean the regulator can act faster when breaches occur and enable more targeted regulatory action.

### **Helen Wakeham, Director for Water, said:**

In our role as regulators of the water industry, we are changing how we operate - with better data, record levels of new staff and greater powers to do our job effectively.

Inspections are a vital preventative measure, with our teams issuing over 3000 individual actions to water companies, including repairing sewage works and upgrading infrastructure.

Together, this will drive meaningful improvements in performance, hold persistent

offenders to account and ultimately create a cleaner water environment.

**Water Minister, Emma Hardy, said:**

This government is delivering on water regulation and these 10,000 inspections prove it.

Thanks to our investment in the Environment Agency, inspectors are out in force, checking water company assets at unprecedented levels and taking action where standards aren't met.

This greater oversight of water companies coupled with our long-term reforms will prevent problems before they occur and ensure serial offenders are punished, ensuring a healthy, sustainable water system for the future.

Checks by Environment Agency officers ensure that water companies' assets, like treatment works, sewage pumping stations, and storm overflows, are operating as they should and within their permits. They play a crucial role in revealing the true picture of water company assets and encouraging greater compliance.

The Environment Agency is empowered to deal with breaches through warnings, advice and guidance up to prosecution as part of our enforcement response, alongside local level actions which tackle the root causes of breaches to prevent future offending and reduce environmental impact.

The longer-term impact of inspections has also been a tool to positively change water company behaviour, with water companies investing into additional site maintenance staff to improve compliance.

Inspections are one part of a wider suite of measures the Environment Agency is using to improve water company performance. The Water Industry National Environment Programme (WINEP) requires wastewater treatment works to be improved to meet tighter effluent standards, water companies now must monitor 100% of storm overflows, and increased enforcement measures from the Water Special Measures Act will allow the EA to use a range of new enforcement powers to drive sector wide change.

1 April marks the legal deadline for water companies to publish Pollution Incident Reduction Plans (PIRPs). These plans, made mandatory by the Water (Special Measures) Act, must set out the specific actions companies will take to cut their pollution, including through better monitoring, clearing blockages, and customer awareness campaigns.

Last week, new Environment Agency data showed there were sharp falls in the number and duration of storm overflow spills in 2025 compared to 2024 helping the Environment Agency target action where it is most needed and ensure water companies continue to improve. This builds on the government's recent launch of the Water White Paper, a once-in-a-generation plan to overhaul the water system, delivering tougher oversight and stronger accountability for water companies.

**Notes to editors**

- A permit condition breach is when a water company fails to comply with the conditions set out in its environmental permit. This can happen for various reasons, such as equipment failure, effluent not meeting water quality standards, not treating required amount of wastewater

flows or failing to manage assets in line with permit requirements.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/inspections-target-smashed-with-10000-health-checks-on-water-network>