

River Test diesel spill results in £350,000 for river project

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WFL UK Ltd paid £350,000 to Wessex Rivers Trust after a 2021 diesel spill on the River Test.

The Environment Agency has secured £350,000 for Wessex Rivers Trust, following a diesel pollution incident in the River Test in June 2021.

The funding will be used to support a river restoration project that enhances habitats for wildlife.

WFL UK Ltd, the second-largest fuel distributor in the UK, agreed to commit the funding following an Environment Agency investigation.

In agreeing to the sanction, which is known as an enforcement undertaking and can be used as an alternative to a prosecution, WFL funds will go directly to environmental improvements rather than legal proceedings.

WFL has also introduced robust measures to prevent future incidents. This included a full appraisal and rebuild of the site alongside strengthened monitoring procedures, costing £3.8 million.

The company will cover the Environment Agency's investigation and enforcement costs

The company will additionally cover the Environment Agency's investigation and enforcement costs of £87,869.95.

The pollution incident occurred in 2021, when a failed underground valve at the company's Nursling industrial estate site in Southampton caused diesel to leak into the surrounding soil. The issue was not immediately identified, as stock losses remained below the threshold for a full investigation.

Heavy rainfall later caused the diesel to enter the river

Although remedial action was taken once the leak was confirmed, heavy rainfall later caused the diesel to enter the river, resulting in harm to wildlife and a high risk of further environmental damage.

WFL accepts that it should have identified the link between the stock losses and the leak sooner and therefore agreed to this enforcement undertaking. It has since changed its working practice so investigation is triggered at a much lower threshold of stock loss. Diesel is now stored overground, making any leaks more easily detected.

The Environment Agency placed a river boom in the River Test

Dawn Theaker of the Environment Agency said:

This pollution incident was preventable and should not have happened. The agreement commits WFL to actions to ensure this will not happen again.

The funds will enable habitat improvement in the local area, benefiting the environment

and communities in Southampton.

Dave Rumble of Wessex Rivers Trust said:

Wessex Rivers Trust has a proven track record in aiding the recovery of rivers, including restoring miles of the magnificent River Test and its tributaries.

We will use the funds from the Enforcement Undertaking to deliver in-river projects which directly benefit the wildlife and people living adjacent to the pollution incident.”

Background

The money pledged will go towards these projects:

- The funds will be split between a project on Tanners Brook and another in the lower River Test Area, supporting habitat restoration.

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/river-test-diesel-spill-results-in-350000-for-river-project>