

South West Water pleads guilty to six years of pollutions

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The water firm admits 18 charges of water pollution in Devon and Cornwall and sentencing is expected on 4 June 2026.

South West Water (SWW) has pleaded guilty to a catalogue of pollution-related charges spanning six years across Devon and Cornwall.

The prosecution, brought by the Environment Agency, concluded at Plymouth Magistrates Court on Thursday this week. Sentencing is expected on 4 June 2026.

Of the charges, 17 are for illegal discharge activities including sewage discharges and one is for failing to take reasonable remedial measures following failure at a sewage pumping station.

The offences took place between January 2015 and July 2021 in five locations: Bodmin, Harlyn, Playing Place, Polperro and Plymouth. Three of the offences that took place occurred across an August Bank Holiday weekend.

At SWW's sewage works near Bodmin, there were 336 illegal spills in the seven years to March 2020. Sewage discharged into the River Camel, which is a special area of conservation, and is a key habitat for Atlantic salmon, bullhead and otters.

On 231 occasions between January 2016 and July 2021, untreated sewage was discharged on to Harlyn beach, a location popular with locals and tourists.

At Hooe Lake Sewage Pumping station near Plymouth, an incident in 2020 led to a sewage discharge which started on the 28 August and continued for 88 hours until the 1 September. Hooe Lake is a priority habitat, designated for its mudflats, open waters and plant species, and is also used for watersports.

Also before the court were several criminal charges relating to spills at Holywell Sewage Pumping Station. SWW previously pleaded guilty to six charges, these will be considered at a later date to be determined.

Clarissa Newell, Environment Agency environment manager for Devon and Cornwall, said:

Getting to this point and securing these guilty pleas was only possible thanks to years of thorough investigation and hard work by Environment Agency officers. They are committed to protecting Devon and Cornwall's greatest assets – the beaches, waters and associated habitats.

Polluters must pay and the Environment Agency continues to do everything in its power to ensure that they do."

South West Water was previously prosecuted in 2023 for 13 charges between July 2016 and August 2020, and was fined £2.15m.

Background

The charges are as follows:

Nanstallon

- That you from 1 January 2015 to 31 December 2015 at Nanstallon Sewage Treatment Works, Bodmin, Cornwall, otherwise than in accordance with an environmental permit, caused a number of water discharge activities, namely discharges into the River Camel.

Contrary to Regulations 12(1)(b) and 38(1)(a) Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2010.

Guilty Plea 26 September 2025

- That you from 1 January 2016 to 31 December 2016 at Nanstallon Sewage Treatment Works, Bodmin, Cornwall, otherwise than in accordance with an environmental permit, caused a number of water discharge activities, namely discharges into the River Camel.

Contrary to Regulations 12(1)(b) and 38(1)(a) Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2010.

Guilty Plea 26 September 2025

- That you from 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2017 at Nanstallon Sewage Treatment Works, Bodmin, Cornwall, otherwise than in accordance with an environmental permit, caused a number of water discharge activities, namely discharges into the River Camel.

Contrary to Regulations 12(1)(b) and 38(1)(a) Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016.

Guilty Plea 26 September 2025

- That you from 1 January 2018 to 31 December 2018 at Nanstallon Sewage Treatment Works, Bodmin, Cornwall, otherwise than in accordance with an environmental permit, caused a number of water discharge activities, namely discharges into the River Camel.

Contrary to Regulations 12(1)(b) and 38(1)(a) Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016.

Guilty Plea 26 September 2025

- That you from 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2019 at Nanstallon Sewage Treatment Works, Bodmin, Cornwall, otherwise than in accordance with an environmental permit, caused a number of water discharge activities, namely discharges into the River Camel.

Contrary to Regulations 12(1)(b) and 38(1)(a) Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016.

Guilty Plea 26 September 2025

- That you from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2020 at Nanstallon Sewage Treatment Works, Bodmin, Cornwall, otherwise than in accordance with an environmental permit, caused a

number of water discharge activities, namely discharges into the River Camel.

Contrary to Regulations 12(1)(b) and 38(1)(a) Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016.

Guilty Plea 26 September 2025

Harlyn

- That you from 1 January 2016 to 31 December 2016 at Harlyn Sewage Pumping Station, Cornwall, otherwise than in accordance with an environmental permit, caused a number of water discharge activities, namely discharges into the Harlyn Stream.

Contrary to Regulations 12(1)(b) and 38(1)(a) Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2010.

Guilty Plea 26 September 2025

- That you from 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2017 at Harlyn Sewage Pumping Station, Cornwall, otherwise than in accordance with an environmental permit, caused a number of water discharge activities, namely discharges into the Harlyn Stream.

Contrary to Regulations 12(1)(b) and 38(1)(a) Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016.

Guilty Plea 26 September 2025

- That you from 1 January 2018 to 31 December 2018 at Harlyn Sewage Pumping Station, Cornwall, otherwise than in accordance with an environmental permit, caused a number of water discharge activities, namely discharges into the Harlyn Stream.

Contrary to Regulations 12(1)(b) and 38(1)(a) Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016.

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Contrary to Regulations 12(1)(b) and 38(1)(a) Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016.

Guilty Plea 26 September 2025

- That you from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2020 at Harlyn Sewage Pumping Station, Cornwall, otherwise than in accordance with an environmental permit, caused a number of water discharge activities, namely discharges into the Harlyn Stream.

Contrary to Regulations 12(1)(b) and 38(1)(a) Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016.

Guilty Plea 26 September 2025

- That you from 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2021 at Harlyn Sewage Pumping Station, Cornwall, otherwise than in accordance with an environmental permit, caused a number of water discharge activities, namely discharges into the Harlyn Stream.

Contrary to Regulations 12(1)(b) and 38(1)(a) Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016.

Guilty Plea 26 September 2025

Halvarras

- That you between 21 September 2018 and 22 September 2018 at Halvarras Sewage Pumping Station, Cornwall, otherwise than in accordance with an environmental permit, caused two water discharge activities, namely discharges into an unnamed stream which is a tributary of Cowlands Creek, part of the Fal Estuary.

Contrary to Regulations 12(1)(b) and 38(1)(a) Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016.

Guilty Plea 26 September 2025

Hooe Lake

- That you between 28 August 2020 and 1 September 2020 at Hooe Lake Sewage Pumping Station, Plymstock, Plymouth, Devon, caused a water discharge activity, namely the discharge of poisonous, noxious or polluting matter, namely untreated sewage, otherwise than in accordance with a permit.

Contrary to Regulations 12(1)(b) and 38(1)(a) Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016.

Guilty Plea 14th November 2024

- That you between 28 August 2020 and 1 September 2020 at Hooe Lake Sewage Pumping Station, Plymstock, Plymouth, Devon, breached condition 2.3.1 of Environmental Permit 032894/V001 in that a discharge of raw sewage occurred and there was a failure to take “all reasonable remedial measures to return the pumping station to normal operation” ... “as soon as reasonably practicable after receipt of warning of failure or of breakdown of the pumping station”.

Contrary to Regulations 12(1)(a) and 38(2) of the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016.

Guilty Plea 14th November 2024

Polperro

- That you between 25 August 2019 and 26 August 2019 at Polperro otherwise than in accordance with an environmental permit, caused a water discharge activity, namely a discharge into Polperro Harbour.

Contrary to Regulations 12(1)(b) & 38(1)(a) of the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016

Guilty Plea 14th November 2024

Bodmin Road

- That you between 27 August 2020 and 29 August 2020 at Budshead Creek, Whitleigh, Plymouth did cause a water discharge activity namely the discharge into inland freshwaters of poisonous, noxious or polluting matter except under or to the extent authorised by and environmental permit.

Contrary to Regulations 12(1)(b) and 38(1)(a) Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016

Guilty Plea 14th November 2024

- That you on 6 September 2020 at Budshead Creek, Whitleigh, Plymouth did cause a water discharge activity namely the discharge into inland freshwaters of poisonous, noxious or polluting matter except under or to the extent authorised by and environmental permit.

Contrary to Regulations 12(1)(b) and 38(1)(a) Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016

Guilty Plea 14th November 2024

Holywell: these will be considered at a later date, to be determined

- That you from 1 January 2016 to 31 December 2016 at Holywell Sewage Pumping Station, Cornwall, otherwise than in accordance with an environmental permit, caused a number of water discharge activities, namely discharges into an unnamed stream that flows onto Holywell Bay Beach.

Contrary to Regulations 12(1)(b) and 38(1)(a) Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2010.

Guilty Plea 26 September 2025

- That you from 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2017 at Holywell Sewage Pumping Station, Cornwall, otherwise than in accordance with an environmental permit, caused a number of water discharge activities, namely discharges into an unnamed stream that flows onto Holywell Bay Beach.

Contrary to Regulations 12(1)(b) and 38(1)(a) Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016.

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Guilty Plea 26 September 2025

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/south-west-water-pleads-guilty-to-six-years-of-pollutions>