

Environment Agency secures £2.35m for environmental improvements

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The Environment Agency has secured £2.35 million from Yorkshire Water for environmental improvements following a series of pollution incidents.

The Agency accepted seven enforcement undertakings after separate pollution incidents at wastewater treatment works and sewer infrastructure across the region.

The agreement is part of a record £8.5 million paid by water companies into environmental restoration projects across the country as part of a strengthened crackdown on pollution and poor performance across the sector.

This compares to £5.8 million the year before, a 47% increase, and just under £2 million in the 2023/24 financial year.

The Yorkshire Water incidents, which took place between 2019 and 2023, involved unauthorised sewage discharges into rivers and watercourses including the Rivers Ure, Dearne, Aire and Calder.

The cash will go to environmental charities to bolster improvements, and includes improvements to nature reserves, wetland habitat creation and restoring flood plains.

Yorkshire Water made the enforcement undertaking offers after Environment Agency investigations into the incidents.

Yorkshire Water will make the following financial contributions:

- £500,000 to Don Catchment Rivers Trust for the failure of a storm tank at Lundwood Wastewater Treatment Works, Barnsley, and unauthorised sewage discharges into the River Dearne.
- £500,000 to Don Catchment Rivers Trust for an unauthorised sewage discharge from a burst rising main at Stainforth Huddle Grounds, Doncaster.
- £350,000 to Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust for an unauthorised sewage discharge from Leyburn Sewage Treatment Works into the River Ure.
- £300,000 to Aire Rivers Trust for three unauthorised sewage discharges into the River Aire from Knostrop Wastewater Treatment Works in Leeds.
- £300,000 split between Yorkshire Wildlife Trust (£150,000) and Calder and Colne Rivers Trust (£150,000) for an unauthorised sewage discharge at High Royd Towpath Combined Sewer Overflow, Sowerby Bridge, into the River Calder.
- £250,000 to Calder and Colne Rivers Trust for an unauthorised sewage discharge from a collapsed combined sewer into Cockleshaw Beck, East Bierley, Kirklees.
- £150,000 to Yorkshire Wildlife Trust for an unauthorised sewage discharge at Laithes Lane in Athersley South in Barnsley.

Money channelled into the environment

In addition to the financial contributions, Yorkshire Water has carried out a wide range of remedial actions at each site as part of the sanctions.

This includes repairing and upgrading infrastructure, installing new alarm and telemetry systems, commissioning ecological surveys and updating operational procedures.

The company will also pay all of the Environment Agency's investigation costs.

Jacqui Tootill, Water Industry Regulation Manager in Yorkshire, said:

While we continue to prosecute and sanction the most serious offences, Enforcement Undertakings allow companies to put right what went wrong and channel money directly into the environment.

This £2.35 million will be invested back into the local area to enhance the environment, delivering real benefits for people and wildlife.

We are continuing to drive meaningful improvements in water company performance, hold persistent offenders to account and ultimately create a cleaner water environment.

Enforcement Undertakings are legally binding agreements between the Environment Agency and companies that have breached environmental rules. The undertaking requires the company to take steps to prevent repetition of the offending and to put right the damage it has caused.

It usually includes a payment to an environmental charity to carry out improvements in the local area. This money can help deliver immediate benefits to the environment, without requiring lengthy and uncertain court proceedings - complementing the EA's wider enforcement action against serial offenders.

Last month, the Environment Agency announced it had completed over 10,000 inspections of water company assets in the last year.

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.

Further background

Enforcement undertakings:

- Enforcement undertakings are a civil sanction available under the Environmental Civil Sanctions (England) Order 2010. They are a legally binding agreement accepted by the Environment Agency.
- The Environment Agency may accept an Enforcement Undertaking where it has reasonable grounds to suspect that the person offering the Undertaking has committed an offence.
- It will only consider accepting an Enforcement Undertaking for cases where the offer itself addresses the cause and effect of the offending; or the offer protects, restores or enhances the environment.
- The Environment Agency continues to prosecute organisations and individuals for

environmental offences where evidence shows high levels of culpability and serious environmental harm.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/environment-agency-secures-235m-for-environmental-improvements>