

Centre City Tower, 7 Hill Street, Birmingham B5 4UA
21 Bloomsbury Street, London WC1B 3HF

By email

19 April 2018

Environmental Information Regulations request - Request For
Information

Reference: EIR 20180438

Dear Sirs

Thank you for your request for information concerning

1. Release into the environment by water and/or sewage companies of so called “bio beads”¹, micro and nanoplastics, including via uncontrolled pollution events over the last three years.
 2. The supply of sewage sludge containing micro and nanoplastics for agricultural use.
 3. Contamination of public water supply with micro and nanoplastics.
 4. The dangers posed by the above to consumers and members of the public.
- Measures and investigations (regulatory and non-regulatory) you have taken regarding the above, and measures and investigations you intend to take regarding the above.

Ofwat confirms it does not hold the information.

- Ofwat is not the regulator for water quality or pollution incidents – instead, the Environment Agency (in England) and Natural Resources Wales (in Wales) have responsibility for monitoring water quality in the environment, with the Drinking Water Inspectorate responsible for water quality in the public water supply.
- The Environment Agency sets out requirements for water and sewerage companies to report on water quality, including discharges from sewage treatment works. They also categorise and report on pollution incidents, and

Centre City Tower, 7 Hill Street, Birmingham B5 4UA
21 Bloomsbury Street, London WC1B 3HF

fine companies when they are not compliant. Natural Resources Wales has similar responsibilities in Wales.

- We do not, therefore, collect detailed information on the quality of discharges, sewage sludge, or water in the public water supply. We also do not conduct research into the danger posed by specific contaminants, or carry out regulatory investigations into this.
- As the economic regulator of the water sector in England and Wales, we instead set and monitor companies against outcome performance commitments – agreed by their customers and other stakeholders, including input from the environmental regulators. These are different depending on local circumstances for each company, but generally include measures such as the level of compliance with measures set out by the environmental regulators – for example, compliance with environmental permit conditions set out by the Environment Agency and Natural Resources Wales; or the numbers of pollution incidents. The [Discover Water website](#) shows some headline statistics across the sector.
- Many of these outcome performance commitments include financial penalties. Where a company does not meet the standards it agreed with customers, these penalties apply automatically to reduce bills in the future. Companies are also incentivised through additional payments to out-perform some of their targets – but only where customers supported this.

Companies are currently considering their business plans for the next price review, and will submit these to us in September. These will include new performance commitments, and companies must consult with their customers on their needs and requirements. ([Headline overview](#)).

- Our website includes some [headline analysis of performance in 2015-16](#) that may illustrate the level of detail at which these incentives are set. This includes a spreadsheet listing all of the commitments made by water and sewerage companies, and their performance against this in 2015-16.

Once an EIR request is answered, it is considered to be in the public domain. To promote transparency, Ofwat may publish the response and any material released on our website in the [FOI disclosure section](#). Any personal information in the letter will be removed before publishing. This document will be held in accordance with

Centre City Tower, 7 Hill Street, Birmingham B5 4UA
21 Bloomsbury Street, London WC1B 3HF

Ofwat's retention and disposal schedule which can be found in our Publication Scheme at the following link <https://www.ofwat.gov.uk/publication/retention-disposals-policy/>. If you have any concerns how Ofwat processes your personal data please contact the Data Protection Officer at FOI@ofwat.gsi.gov.uk. To view Ofwat's full privacy policy please go to <https://www.ofwat.gov.uk/publication/privacy-policy/>

If you have any queries or concerns with regard to the content of this email please do contact me, quoting the reference number.

Further information concerning your rights is available from the Information Commissioner's Office at:

<https://ico.org.uk/>

or

The Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow

Yours sincerely,

Christine Manise

Senior Associate

Programme and Project Management

Tel: 0121 644 7664

Ofwat, Centre City Tower, 7 Hill Street, Birmingham. B5 4UA

[ofwat.gov.uk](https://www.ofwat.gov.uk)

Follow us at: twitter.com/ofwat

Freedom of Information/EIR Provide the Information

Centre City Tower, 7 Hill Street, Birmingham B5 4UA
21 Bloomsbury Street, London WC1B 3HF