

21 November 2022

Water customers update on investigation into sewage treatment works

Dear water customer,

I wrote to customers last year after Ofwat opened our investigation into how all wastewater companies in England and Wales manage their sewage treatment works. One year on, I want to update you on the progress we have made and on our work to push wastewater companies to improve their impact on our rivers and seas.

Enforcement action

Every time we see sewage being discharged into our rivers and seas, it causes more anger and questions. To help understand whether this is down to illegal activity with how companies manage their treatment works, we've made more than 30 evidence requests of companies and analysed over 3,000 pieces of evidence so far. What we learned led us to initially open enforcement cases against five companies: Anglian Water, Northumbrian Water, Thames Water, Wessex Water and Yorkshire Water in March 2022. Whilst these five companies were our initial focus, all wastewater companies remain part of our wider investigation. In June, growing concerns about environmental performance led us to open a further enforcement case against South West Water. We're scrutinising all the evidence and understand the importance of addressing these issues as soon as possible – it is also important that we meet the high standards required for any enforcement action. If you want to hear more about what we find as the enforcement cases progress, we will be posting regular updates [on our website](#).

Improvement plans

Alongside our enforcement work, [I wrote to all wastewater companies](#) asking them to set out immediate plans to improve river quality at no extra cost to customers. Companies have now committed to reduce sewage discharges by 25% by 2025. We are monitoring these plans and, from 2025, have proposed compulsory annual targets for further improvement – we'll back ambitious and innovative plans to further reduce discharges. We've moved to make sure companies are spending more of shareholders' money to reduce use of storm overflows and published proposals to strengthen our ability to take action against companies paying out excessive dividends while failing to deliver for customers and the environment.

Our expectations

Both Ofwat and the public have high expectations that wastewater companies will improve. We expect them to:

- Be open and transparent with their data on river water quality
- Comply with their legal obligations on storm overflows
- Keep the promises that they have made to their customers on cleaning up our rivers and seas

Everyone deserves access to clean waters to enjoy. We have been clear with wastewater companies that the sewage discharges on our beaches and coastlines that we have seen over the past few months are unacceptable and that they must do better. We will continue to keep you informed of their progress.

Yours sincerely,

David Black

Ofwat Chief Executive