

Devon and Cornwall – Bathing Water Information

August 2022

Bathing Water Monitoring

The Environment Agency is required to follow the monitoring requirements set out in the Bathing Water Regulations (2013). These specify a fixed bathing water season between 15th May and 30th September. Monitoring is required to take place within these dates except for the first sample of the season which is required to be taken shortly before the start of the season.

We take between five and twenty water samples at each of England's designated bathing waters during the bathing season each year. In each sample we test for bacteria that indicate whether there is faecal matter in the water. These are known as faecal indicator organisms or FIOS and the specific ones we test for are E. coli and Intestinal enterococci.

This monitoring is used to produce a classification scheme set out within the Regulations. The samples taken each season are combined with up to 4 years' worth of data from previous seasons to give a bathing water its annual classification. Classifications give a long-term assessment of water quality over a four-year period. This has many uses including being able to make a comparison of water quality between bathing waters and also allowing the Environment Agency to make decisions on long-term pollution reduction measures.

Classification information:

At some bathing waters, the quality is so consistent that only five samples are needed to robustly determine their classification. Whereas, at waters that have more variable quality, 10, 15 or 20 samples are necessary.

Going beyond the statutory monitoring requirements for a fixed season set out in the Regulations is not within the Environment Agency's remit and would require changing policy and/or legislation which are the responsibility of Defra (bathingwater@defra.gov.uk).

An annual classification gives an overall assessment of water quality, but it does not give bathers the real-time information of the risk at any given time.

Warning the public

There are two instances when we warn the public that there is a risk of a reduction in water quality at a bathing water, which may pose a risk to bathers' health. These are through Pollution Risk Forecasting or an environmental incident.

In both cases, when a temporary reduction in water quality is forecast, we issue a pollution risk warning and advice against bathing. Warnings are posted on [our water quality website - Swimfo](#), and the local authority are informed, who will ensure that appropriate information is actively disseminated and promptly made available to the public during the bathing season in an easily accessible place in the near vicinity of the bathing water.

customer service line
03708 506 506

incident hotline
0800 80 70 60

floodline
03459 88 11 88

This enables bathers to avoid times or locations where the risk of pollution is higher than normal, and health risks from bathing may be higher than the annual classification suggests.

Pollution Risk Forecasting

Throughout the bathing season, we make daily pollution risk forecasts for a number of bathing waters, where water quality **may be** temporarily reduced due to factors, such as heavy rainfall, wind or the tide.

Environmental Incident

We run a 24-hour environmental incident response service via our Incident Communication Service 0800807060. All incidents are assessed and prioritised (those incidents with more potential for environmental harm). Where required local officers will attend or otherwise act to manage / resolve an incident.

At any point during the year, we may need to warn the public that there has been a pollution incident, which may affect bathing water quality.

These can be reported via our national incident service and once the incident has been reported we will publish an “advice against bathing” message on Swimfo. Such pollution incidents will be subject to our normal incident management procedures and the relevant authorities will be notified.

Swimfo

If you would like further information on our current understanding of the pollution sources that can affect bathing waters and the work that has been carried out to tackle these, it can be found by reading the bathing water profiles on Swimfo.

Queries raised

Please find below our responses to queries raised in your emails dated 23 and 24 August 2022.

Question:

Do the Environment Agency received information from BeachLive.

Answer:

South West Water’s voluntary bathing water information service, [BeachLive](#), provides free alerts to beach managers, the Environment Agency and Surfers Against Sewage for beaches in Devon and Cornwall when stormwater overflows may temporarily affect bathing water quality, whilst protecting people and property from internal sewer flooding. Further information can be found on the SWW website [here](#) . Members of the public can receive these warnings by registering with the Surfers Against Sewage (SAS) [Safer Seas and Rivers Service Here](#).

The Environment Agency do get notified by BeachLive of a spill or when assets are under maintenance. However, if we require detailed spill information on specific water company assets or in a specific location for a longer period of time, we would request it through the water company. The water company have a statutory obligation to self-report any incidents of unpermitted sewage discharge that can include infrastructure failures. Self-reporting is just

one of the indicators used to measure the water companies' environmental performance assessment.

We routinely request data from SWW, to help support investigations into environmental risks. We also review the annual reporting of event duration monitoring against compliance.

Question:

Is this [Devon Live] report correct please? Having defended the information, I was given it was sheep manure, the local press are reporting this:

A sewer overflow discharges into a small, freshwater lagoon some 540m behind the beach. Some sewer overflows may also discharge into the Torridge and Taw rivers at the southern end of the beach. The Environment Agency said the reduced water quality was due to sheep poo being washed into the sea.

Please can I have an urgent response and if this is not correct

Answer:

Within the SAS app, there are listed assets against each bathing water which could impact on the bathing water if it were to spill and therefore affect bathing water quality.

The Devon Live reporter has taken two separate sources of information and combined them into the article under the Saunton sands heading.

1- The water company assets which could potentially impact on the bathing water if they were to spill.

2- The incident that occurred on the 14/08/2022

Regarding the incident on the 14/08/22, SWW have confirmed that their assets were operating normally, and not impacting on the bathing water.

The information regarding the sheep manure came from the local environmental officer who was on site to investigate. This incident has occurred previously following the inundation of the low-lying agricultural land from astronomic spring tides.