

Update from Environment Agency for public meeting

We authorise the discharge of storm sewage from sewage works or storm overflows when heavy rainfall overloads the sewer network. This is necessary in order to prevent the flooding of people's homes, workplaces and neighbourhoods with sewage. Storm overflows are subject to strict conditions which are set out in the environmental permits for each site. These require minimum dilution levels and other measures in order to protect the environment.

Over 19-20 October 2021 there were heavy thundery downpours across Hampshire, Isle of Wight and Sussex. As a result it is likely that permitted storm discharges took place at several locations. The catchment of Portsmouth and Havant use both long and short storm outfalls subject to permitted requirements.

We do not require Southern Water to report compliant storm discharges to us each time they occur, only in aggregated event and duration (EDM) summary data. Southern Water report EDM data to the Environment Agency annually on just under 1,500 monitored discharge points. During prolonged rainfall, many of these discharge points will produce multiple telemetry signals daily and we are not resourced to check the accuracy of notifications that regularly.

We use this data to monitor environmental permit compliance on an annual basis and to assess the requirements for investment under the next cycle of the Water Industry National Environment Programme. The value of this approach has been highlighted by the success of our recent 'Operation Garden' Major Investigation, which recently concluded with a fine of £90 million imposed on Southern Water by Canterbury Crown Court. We used storm discharge EDM data together with flow data to assess environmental permit compliance at multiple storm discharges operating in coastal waters across Hampshire, Sussex and Kent, including several discharging into Langstone and Chichester Harbours.

If members of the public see any sign of pollution, please call our incident hotline on 0800 80 70 60 to report this to us.

8 November 2021

customer service line
03708 506 506

incident hotline
0800 80 70 60

floodline
03459 88 11 88