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unitedutilities.com

Our ref: EIR-404
Date: 13/06/2025
Email: EIRRequests@uuplc.co.uk

Dear [redacted]

Thank you for your request for environmental information. We appreciate your interest, and we want to let you know that your request has been carefully considered in accordance with the Environmental Information Regulations (EIR). Please see our comments, as follows:

I am requesting the following information:

Details of all sewage discharges (including storm overflows and untreated discharges) into the waters around Wallasey for the last five years (or the most recent period for which data is held).

Please include:

Dates, times, and durations of each discharge event

Please find attached EDM return data for Wallasey and Moreton Bathing Waters, from 1st January 2021 to 12th May 2025. Please note, Environmental permits stipulate whether we report an overflow's EDM as part of the bathing water return. Following agreement with the EA, some additional sites have been added in accordance with Environment Act definition but not stipulated in the current permit.

Please note the permitting and EDM reporting are **only** reporting requirements. The bathing water return indicates which bathing water an overflow could impact **but is not a measure of any impact.**

There are a number of important points which should be taken into account when reviewing this:

- It is important to note this data is the raw sensor signals, which have not been analysed to remove anomalies or errors. Therefore, any analysis conducted using these raw, unvalidated signals will inevitably be flawed and give rise to misleading conclusions if it is treated as validated EDM sensor data.
- The raw sensor signals are those referred to in step 1 of our 5 step process to report on spills from storm overflows which is described here. During the subsequent steps, quality checks and data validation is carried out to convert the raw signals into our annual EDM data return which is available on the same webpage.
- These raw sensor signals cannot be used as an accurate basis for how many actual discharges there were. This is because some of the raw unvalidated sensor signals are found to be inaccurate or unreliable once inspected and assessed, which could, for example, be due to water motion in storm tanks, fluvial flooding, abnormal weather conditions, animal interference or sensor failure.

- The raw signals are subject to an auditable process of data validation and analysis before the regulatory EDM return is produced, which is the only source of data from which conclusions about storm overflow operation can accurately be made.

As you may be aware, the Environment Agency (EA) requires all water companies to report the number of days each storm overflow operates each year, following standard rules, so to best understand the environmental impact of storm overflow operation. Data is captured by sensors, and we have these on every one of our 2,264 storm overflows. Millions of pieces of sensor data are gathered, and a standard process converts this into an annual report on storm overflow performance. The first stage captures data signals that suggest spills may have occurred. This includes all data, with no errors removed.

Following the initial recording of data, we convert the data through various stages to reach a final spill count number as part of the EA requirement to submit a regulatory return. That process involves various investigations of data which may be erroneous. The regulatory return is finalised and sent to the EA in the spring for the previous calendar year. Further details regarding the spill data process are found on our website here - https://www.unitedutilities.com/better-rivers/our-challenges/storm-overflow-performance/.

Volumes (if recorded or estimated) Locations (preferably with map coordinates or clear site references)

Our permits set out regulatory requirements for treatment and discharge of effluent. They are available from the Environment Agency public register https://environment.data.gov.uk/public-register/view/index. There is no requirement to measure volume of discharge under the environmental permits. We therefore do not hold this data and are unable to provide it in accordance with Regulation 12(4)(a) EIR.

We are committed to being transparent about our performance. You can find data and information on how we are doing year-on-year here Storm overflow performance | United Utilities. In addition to that we share real-time monitoring data via our storm overflow map. This shows all our storm overflow locations and whether they are operating or have done so in the last 24 hours, plus information on our plans to tackle them. Storm overflow map | United Utilities - Better Rivers.

Causes of the discharges (e.g., heavy rainfall, equipment failure, maintenance, etc.)

Storm overflows act as a pressure relief valve when there is too much rainfall, allowing rainwater, mixed with sewage to rise inside the sewer, and eventually enter a separate pipe which flows into a river or the sea.

When the system is operating normally, sewage leaves our homes and businesses, sometimes mixed with rainwater, and is sent to one of our nearest treatment works. Sewers are typically 15% full when it is dry. If an area is hit by heavy rain, the sewers sometimes become completely full of water and the sewage begins backing up. If there was no storm overflow in place, this sewage could enter homes and streets, as the wastewater would force its way out of the network pipes of pipes to the surface, often rising through manhole covers.

Under strict conditions, and with the permission of the Environment Agency, water companies are allowed to spill wastewater into the river and see because it is accepted there is a limited capacity inside sewer pipes. Even if a sewer is completely unobstructed and of the approved size, there could still be times where storm water completely fills them. After heavy rainfall, groundwater can also

find its way into the combined sewers, adding to the amount of water in the pipe and increasing the chance that a spill may occur. You can read more about how storm overflows work, and our challenges here.

Any monitoring data or reports you hold relating to the environmental or public health impact of these discharges, including water quality sampling results from sites in or around Wallasey.

Please note, the Environment Agency are responsible for bathing water quality and sampling. This information is available on their website: Bathing water quality

It is worth noting the 2024 classifications as per the Environment agency state the bathing water at Moreton was "Excellent" and at Wallasey was "Good".

Risk assessments or internal evaluations carried out by United Utilities that assess the impact of these discharges on recreational water users, such as swimmers and paddle boarders.

United Utilities do not carry out risk assessments or internal evaluations which assess the impact of discharges, this is something that the Environment Agency do. You can read more about this here Bathing water profile. This also highlights other sources of pollution which could impact bathing water quality.

Bathing waters are subject to coastal investigations agreed with the Environment Agency. Where the EA identify a site requiring improvements, they will issue Water Industry National Environment Programme (WINEP) specific bathing water drivers for a 'water company contribution to improve and maintain the bathing water quality class'. The scope of the improvement will be agreed with the EA as part of the WINEP process.

Planned or ongoing improvement works to address or reduce the frequency and volume of discharges in this area.

We absolutely understand the public concern there is about the use of storm overflows and while we have made progress in reducing spills, we know there is much more to do. Changing the sewer system and the way the North West is plumbed can't happen overnight but we are committed to making the step change required.

We are now embarking on the largest multi-billion investment programme in a century, investing £13 billion between 2025 and 2030 to upgrade the water and wastewater infrastructure across the North West. In addition, the plan is securing 30,000 jobs in the wider supply chain across the region, of which 7,000 are new job opportunities, helping to support the local economy.

We've already begun to reduce spills at 150 storm overflows across the region and more schemes are mobilising to improve nearly 200km of rivers. You can find out more about that here.

Those pipes are typically never more than 15% full with sewerage but when also filled with rainfall and at times of heavy downpours they can become overloaded. Storm overflows act as a safety valve to prevent them backing up and flooding people's homes and businesses.

Reducing the need for storm overflows to operate means we must reduce the amount of rainfall getting into the pipes in the first place. United Utilities is working with others, such as local authorities and housing developers, on solutions to remove rainwater from the sewer network and slow the flow of water across catchment land, such as installing sustainable drainage on new build

developments and limiting run off from highways too.

In the North West, there are more than 2,200 storm overflows and 54% of our sewer network is combined – which is above the average of 33% across England.

In addition to creating more storage capacity at our treatment works and separating surface water run off from the sewers, we are also improving the day-to-day operation of our sewer system. We're installing thousands of sensors to give us a real-time view of what is happening below ground. Already this is helping us spot problems early and take action to remove blockages before they result in flooding or spillages.

In the document attached named 'EIR-404 Wallasey and Moreton Improvements', you will find a list of improvements. For each site, we've indicated the Asset Management Period (AMP) by which the associated Water Industry National Environment Programme (WINEP) regulatory requirement is currently scheduled to be met. Please note, as many of these projects are at different stages of development or not planned to start until a future AMP, it's not currently possible to provide further detail on the scope, final design, or specific delivery timelines. These elements will continue to evolve as projects progress and more information becomes available. However, these projects are regulatory requirements set and agreed by the Environment Agency to ensure the asset meets the Environment Act 2021 targets within the stated timeframes.

We hope that this response answers your request. However, if you're not satisfied with how we've handled it, you can request an internal review. To do this, please write to us at Environmental Information Office, Haweswater House, Lingley Mere, Warrington, WA5 3LP or email us at EIRRequests@uuplc.co.uk, addressing your request to [redacted], and explaining why you're unhappy with our response. We'll be very happy to review your request and ensure we've done everything we can to assist you.

Any request for an internal review should be made within 40 working days of receipt of this response, and we will reply within 40 working days from receipt of the request for internal review.

Many thanks
EIR Team

We'd love to hear your feedback on how we handled your request! If you have a moment, please complete our short survey here – your input helps us improve our service.