

# UNFLUSHABLES COMMUNITY CAMPAIGN



To raise awareness of simple things people can do to help protect and enhance the watercourses and coastline around them.

## BACKGROUND

Pollution arising from incorrect disposal of waste into the sewage and surface water drainage system, or incorrect maintenance of small-scale waste water treatment systems can result in pollution of watercourses and negative impacts to aquatic flora and fauna.

Blockages within the sewage system resulting from disposal or unflushable items and Fats Oils and Grease (FOG) can cause untreated sewage to bypass waste water treatment systems and discharge directly to rivers and coastlines. Over 23,000 blockages occur every year on Southern Waters 39,600km sewer network, two thirds of which could be prevented by correctly disposing of FOG and unflushable items in the bin. Misconnection of residential and commercial waste water pipes can result in foul waste from toilets, washing machines, dishwashers, showers, baths and sinks water being discharged into surface water drains rather than the sewage system. This allows untreated waste water to enter watercourses, polluting local streams, rivers and beaches. Inappropriate disposal engine oil, cooking oil, paints, chemical wastes, detergents and litter of into road and surface water drains designed only to carry rainwater, results in pollution entering the receiving watercourse. Discharge of Phosphate into the aquatic environment is acknowledged to be a major issue within the Test and Itchen catchments. High levels of Phosphate enter the sewage system from households and businesses on mains drainage via the use of domestic cleaning products and the collective impact of septic tanks and small sewage treatment plants on the catchments rivers is substantial.

The issues identified above can cause failures in water quality standards required by the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD) and revised Bathing Water Directive (rBWD), in addition to the following negative consequences to freshwater and marine environments:

- Ammonia contained in sewage is directly toxic to fish and aquatic life.
- Sewage, grey water and cooking oils and fats can cause oxygen levels to decrease due to high Biological Oxygen Demand (BOD).
- Phosphate in sewage and grey water can cause increased plant growth and eutrophication – a particular issue within chalk streams such as the River Test and Itchen.
- Pollution entering rivers inland can cause pollution on beaches and in bathing waters.
- Misconnections, blockages and littering can lead to river banks being covered with unsightly and non-biodegradable material.



## OBJECTIVES

The campaign will highlight the environmental impact of particular behaviours in each of these areas, particularly:

- Impact on water quality and ecological communities
- Impact of plastics on the environment
- Costs to companies (and therefore customers) of tackling blockages
- Impact and cost of internal blockages to customers

To engage and encourage communities to take steps to protect their local environment by raising awareness of the impacts of of misconnections, polluting spillages and blockages in urban and rural areas.

Participants will be able to pick from a “menu” of options that best suits their location or catchment and will be able to align the materials with their own campaigns and key messages.

The strategy will be defined by the key partners and respective Catchment Partnerships, while the delivery will be undertaken alongside the local community and relevant groups, charities or organisations groups in each participating catchment.

In addition, the Campaign aligns with Southern Water’s environmental policies and business objectives, including their Environmental Transformational Priority, Environment Policy and Plastics Policy.

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## ACTIONS

There is an opportunity for partner organisations and volunteers to undertake walkover surveys and sampling to identify discharges resulting in visible organic pollution and litter, allowing identification of potential improvements through co-ordination with water companies and regulators. Development of a local 'Outfall Safari' group to train volunteers to map and record the impact of polluted surface water outfalls in a river would engage the local community in protecting and improving their local water environment, whilst developing new skills.

Separate topics will sit under a broader Unflushables banner, focusing on:

- Unflushables – especially wipes, sanitary products and cotton buds.
- Fat, Oils and Grease (FOG) – both domestic and non-domestic.
- Plastics – especially single-use plastics.
- Misconnections – both domestic and non-domestic.
- Yellow Fish campaign – highlighting surface water sewers.
- Septic Tanks – in rural areas not on mains drainage.
- "Eyes and ears" – to quickly report any issues on the Southern Water network.

## PILOT AREAS

Initial areas have been identified in which to pilot the campaign. These have been selected based upon Southern Water sewer mapping and known waste water pollution hotspots.

- Eastleigh – River Itchen and Monks Brook
- Havant – Leigh Park in relation to Hermitage Stream and Langstone Harbour.
- Isle of Wight – Cowes
- New Forest – Eastern conurbations and impact on the Solent.

## SUCCESSFUL OUTCOMES

### Community engagement impacts

Number of volunteers and volunteer hours delivered in the programmes  
Number of schools, clubs, groups involved  
Number of school children / adults engaged  
Number of awareness sessions delivered

### Environmental benefits

Number of misconnections identified  
Reduction in use of single-use plastics  
Reduction in sewer blockages caused by FOG or unflushables  
Number of surface water sewers highlighted by Yellow Fish

## ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

The project has so far been lead by representatives from the Catchment Partnerships of East Hampshire, Test and Itchen and the New Forest. The Isle of Wight Catchment Partnership is also keen to partner and, once the campaign materials are developed – these will be shared with Catchment Partnerships across the rest of Southern Water's region in Kent and Sussex. These representatives will provide direction and co-ordination to the project and will share this campaign plan with their respective Catchment Partnerships to secure support for the approach, scope and subsequent development of campaign materials. Each Catchment Partnership will be encouraged to identify local delivery partners and, where required, help raise funding for their engagement programme as well as support with the delivery of the campaign.

