

Sewage spills into River Lim more than triple – slow death of river from pollution

Latest data out from the Environment Agency on sewage spills in 2022 showed that discharges into the River Lim, in Lyme Regis, more than tripled over the previous year. This is against the trend for England which showed a slight decrease.

There were nearly 2,200 hours of sewage spills (coming out of the six Combined Sewer Overflows [CSOs]) on the Lim. This compares with 680 in 2021 and 376 in 2020. Importantly, 2022 was a drier year where spills would be expected to be lower.

This huge increase partly explains the high levels of faecal bacteria being found in the River by the River Lim Action group's monitors and by the Environment Agency (EA). High levels of bacteria have been found from just below the Uplyme Sewage Treatment Works to the mouth of the river. A CSO at Jericho poured 628 hours of untreated sewage into a foot of water. There could be a further problem at the Gosling Bridge CSO but the monitor on it was only working for 25% of the time.

The CSO just below the Uplyme Sewage Treatment Works disgorged sewage for a colossal 1,493 hours despite reassurances from South West Water that the Works have enough capacity.

“We had hoped things were getting better but they are going in totally the wrong direction”, said Vicki Elcoate of the River Lim Action group. “We’ve got the illegal misconnections into the River, which are causing a huge problem, and now we’ve discovered that South West Water is massively adding to the sewage pollution through its licensed CSOs.

“All this despite months of talking to them and investigations into what is causing these problems which are leading to the slow death of this beautiful and iconic river”.

The River Lim Action group is calling for:

- The results of the ongoing investigations referred to in the EA report to be published, with an action plan to stop these high levels of discharges
- South West Water to prioritise investment into the Uplyme Sewage Treatment Works and Lyme Regis drainage and pumping system to cut these discharges by 90% – as promised
- Residents to sign up to the River Lim Action Group and write to the local MP Chris Loder hello@chrisloder.co.uk

“Because of the huge damage this level of pollution is causing to the River Lim and to the town’s residents, visitors and businesses, Lyme Regis should be a priority for urgent investment. Whilst the Government’s announcement today about bringing forward investment of £1.6 billion is good news, the amount on offer is totally inadequate. It can’t wait as the problem is getting so much worse year on year – these figures are heartbreaking”, said Vicki Elcoate.

Graham Roberts, retired freshwater ecologist who lives in Lyme Regis, said: ‘This is both a local and a national scandal. Governments, water companies and regulators need to step up. It is urgent that these issues are sorted before it is too late and our rivers are beyond ecological recovery.’