

**Progressive Environmental Protection in North Wessex Area**

The last year has been one of change and challenge. Although the Agency was established on 1 April, the work needed to start to bring the various predecessor bodies together into an integrated organisation has not distracted you from significant achievements in protecting and changing the environment. This leaflet records the Area's successes over the past year. It also sets out our main objectives for the coming year. I hope you will find it of interest.

The next twelve months will be at least as challenging as the last twelve. I look forward to meeting that challenge with you.

Chris Birks
Area Manager
March 1997

North Wessex Area Achievements 1996/97

The establishment of the Environment Agency has given us a great opportunity for working together and has demonstrated the effectiveness of an Area based organisation. Our key achievements include:

- Habitat improvements on the Rivers Huntspill and Marden with bank regrading, planting of reed and willows and the creation of gravel runs. Fisheries and conservation improvements to the River Tone at Obridge.
- Prompting and ensuring clean-up of contamination beneath the Bristol Clifton Suspension Bridge and adjoining Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) by the various parties responsible for shotblasting the bridge in 1995. A number of extremely rare botanical species were thereby saved.
- As part of the agreement for the Batheaston Bypass, we insisted upon the creation of new oxbow and wetland to replace lost floodplain storage. Small reed bed areas were also installed to act as filters for road run-off.
- Securing a high degree of waste regulating consistency within the three county teams transferred to the Agency, including the successful merging of electronic files containing the records of almost 4,000 waste carriers.
- The character of the Somerset Levels and Moors was maintained through completion of work on the newly refurbished Northmoor Pumping Station, refurbishment of West Sedgemoor Pumping Station, two weed cuts on the 450km of main river and dredging of 50km, including 1.5km of the tidal River Parrett using amphibious Watermasters in the channel.
- Continuing to encourage the companies we regulate under Integrated Pollution Control to achieve the highest environmental standards through the implementation of Best Practicable Environmental Option (BPEO) and Best Available Technique Not Entailing Excessive Cost (BATNEEC). Notable achievements have been:

Blagden Packaging (Avonmouth) - Incinerator now upgraded to the highest UK standard.

ICI Fertilizers (Avonmouth) - Scheme for by-product recovery and resale now avoids disposal as effluent.

Rolls Royce (Filton) - Reduced emissions of volatile organics to atmosphere despite increased process output.

Rhône Poulenc (Avonmouth) - Upgrading of effluent treatment system to prevent chemical releases to the local streams in the event of a major incident.

- Continuing promotion of sea defence schemes. Brean sea defence improvements were completed and a £15m sea defence scheme for Minehead begun.
- The impact of future development on the environment being minimised, our proposed policies being successfully defended at various local planning inquiries.
- The successful implementation in September 1996 of a new system for the control of movement and disposal of special (hazardous) wastes. We have dealt with over 10,000 movements of special waste and contributed towards the successful monitoring of over:

300 licensed waste management facilities

3,700 waste carriers

65 exempted scrapyards

1,200 other exempted facilities.



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- Implementation of the Malmesbury Avon alleviation of low flow study trials, increased stream support and the publication of a report on the 1996 trials.
- A large tracing exercise in the Severn Estuary as part of an investigation into bathing water at Clevedon and Weston-super-Mare. Monitoring of all designated bathing waters in the Area showed compliance with the mandatory coliform standards specified in the EC Bathing Water Directive.
- Achieving support and implementation of the Agency's environmental policy through establishment of local Green Circle Group.
- Investigating and putting into practice systems for monitoring and improvement of recycling and environmental performance.
- Publishing various Local Environment Agency Plans, as well as Catchment Management Plan Action Plans and Reviews:
 - Annual Review of Upper Bristol Avon Action Plan
 - River Tone Action Plan
 - River Parrett Consultation Report
 - River Severn Lower Reaches Annual Review 1
- Implementing the Customer Account Manager protocol to co-ordinate multi functional regulation at major sites.
- Safety Awareness Days for all Area staff where various environmental and health and safety issues were discussed, and practical exercises held.
- Piloting the Trophic Diatom Index to assess the extent of eutrophication in running freshwater. Reports were produced which supported the bid for designation of the Bristol Avon from Chippenham to the Netham as a Sensitive Area.
- Statutory and mandatory water quality sampling to monitor consent compliance at over 450 discharge and 400 environmental sites. In total over 20,000 samples and almost 600 biological samples were collected.
- Investigating in excess of 1800 reported pollution incidents and, as a result, raising invoices under the polluter pays principle. These amounted to 43% of the regional total.
- A cross-functional initiative which resulted in the successful solution of low flows in the Washford River.
- Significant Area contributions, including a pond and garden display, towards the "Garden with Care" leaflet which was launched nationally at the National Amateur Gardening Show, attended by over 40,000 people.
- A number of successful key prosecutions and enforcement actions taken. These included:
 - Prosecution following the pesticide pollution of the Somerton Mill Stream. Contaminated silts were removed from the affected length of the watercourse and associated ponds.*
 - The first successful prosecution in North Wessex for illegal spray irrigation under Section 23 of the Water Resources Act 1990.*
 - Successful prosecution for unlicensed management of scrap metal and related waste, resulting in a fine of £50,000 plus costs.*

A prohibition notice issued against a company to prevent operation of a cadmium plating process which had already led to contamination of a river and has the potential to cause further serious environmental damage.

A custodial sentence for an attack by an elver fisherman on two fisheries inspectors.

- Achieving 100% of the Regional OPM target for abstraction licence enforcement during the year.
- Contributing to the control of BSE in the Area. Visiting and scrutinising the disposal arrangements of all abattoirs, knackers yards and hunt kennels in North Wessex Area.
- Following an explosion at Albright and Wilson at Avonmouth an activated carbon absorption unit was provided and monitored for use in removing contaminants from polluted fire water prior to discharge.
- Area involvement in producing a variety of Area, Regional and National publications. These included:
 - Area Commercial Waste Minimisation and Recycling Directory
 - Gold Corner Pumping Station
 - Guidance Notes for Riparian Landowners
 - History of the By Brook
 - Garden with Care



North Wessex Area Key Targets 1997/98

There are a range of projects within North Wessex aimed at achieving real and lasting improvements to the environment.

- Progress work on Minehead sea defences
- Collaborative project to enhance Cribbs Causeway (Catbrain) surface water detention reservoir.
- Ensure reduction in pollution risk at Galmington Industrial Estate.
- Implement restoration plans at Semington Brook, River Biss, Dauntsey Brook.
- Working in partnership with Somerset County Council to apply for lottery money to turn buildings at Northmoor Pumping Station into a Levels and Moors Visitor Centre which will inform the public about the special environment measures needed to sustain the Levels and Moors.
- To implement the restructuring plan to ensure that the Agency is able to concentrate all its efforts on the environment.
- Improvements to the brown trout habitat in the Upper Bristol Avon.
- Facilitate the minimisation of waste produced by industry and commerce within the Area, through a programme of advice, education and encouragement.
- Maintain the character of the Somerset Levels and Moors by completing the annual planned maintenance whilst making a major contribution to the debate on the future of the area by producing a report for consultation on the Strategic Review of Flood Defence operations.
- Continue to monitor the ecological effects of the implementation of the water level management strategy for the Somerset Levels and Moors.
- Working in partnership with the Avon Wildlife Trust on the North Somerset Levels Project to achieve habitat enhancements on main rivers, surveys of bird interest and otter populations; wetland rehabilitation.
- Use of the National Conservation strategy which gives priority to sites covered by the European Habitats Directive; maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity; collaborative projects and LEAPs.
- A pilot for the National Waste Strategy requires the survey of over 100 industrial and commercial producers of waste in the early spring. This will be followed by a full survey involving 800 premises later in 1997/98.
- The limits and conditions in the authorisations for Magnox Electric sites will be reviewed on the basis of recent developments in national standards for radiological protection. This will ensure best practicable means continues to be used to minimise creation and discharge of radioactive waste and the protection of the environment.
- To ensure the progressive reduction in the environmental impact from major solvent recovery and chemical sites by regular review of IPC authorisations, including those for Premiere Environmental Ltd (Westbury, Wilts), Chemical Recoveries Ltd, Albright and Wilson Ltd, Rhône Poulenc Chemicals Ltd and Zeneca Ltd (all at Avonmouth).
- Completion of an Area Business Continuity Plan to ensure that the Area is always able to provide the services required to maintain our work in the environment.
- Continued delivery of LEAPs and CMP reviews which include

Upper Bristol Avon	Annual Review 2	May 1997
Lower Bristol Avon	Annual Review 1	May 1997
Severn Estuary	Consultation Report	May 1997
River Brue	Consultation Report	May 1997
Severn Estuary	Action Plan	Oct 1997
River Parrett	Action Plan	Oct 1997
North Somerset Rivers	Consultation Report	Oct 1997
River Severn Lower Reaches	Annual Report 2	Jan 1998
West Somerset Rivers	Consultation Report	Feb 1998
River Brue	Action Plan	Feb 1998

ENVIRONMENT AGENCY GENERAL ENQUIRY LINE

0645 333 111

The 24-hour emergency hotline number for reporting all environmental incidents relating to air, land and water.

ENVIRONMENT AGENCY EMERGENCY HOTLINE

0800 80 70 60

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