

EA-Southern

Box 4

What's happening in Southern Re



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AGENCY

Southern Region

Snapshot of the environment

The Environment Agency's Southern Region is the UK's 'Gateway to Europe', which brings many economic advantages but also creates unique pressures. Between 1991 and 1997, population in the region increased by four per cent, double the UK average. As a result there is increasing pressure on already limited water resources, living space and roads. However, almost a third of the region is designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and 709 Sites of Special Scientific Interest cover almost six percent of the land.

Main issues

Air quality

Emissions of all major pollutants in the region have fallen since 1990, but there are still concerns about.

- Relatively high concentrations of particulates and ozone.
- Traffic pollution. About one in 12 households own three or more cars (more than anywhere else in the country) and each person travels an average of 6,900 miles by car a year (more than in any other region. Increases in traffic may lead to higher nitrogen oxide levels.

Working closely with industry, the Agency is helping to ensure that polluting emissions in the region continue to fall.

The good news is:

- Air quality is improving, and emissions of all pollutants are steadily falling
- The quality of rivers and bathing waters has improved significantly in recent years
- Wildlife is thriving in the region's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Waste

Each year 13 million tonnes of waste are generated in the region – enough to cover more than 230 football pitches to a depth of ten metres. The region also imports a further three million tonnes of waste from London for disposal. About 90 percent of this waste is currently sent to landfill sites.

Over the next two decades EU legislation will drastically reduce the amount of household waste that can be landfilled, however. This is why some local authorities are considering building new waste incinerators. The Environment Agency is urging that less waste is produced and much more is recycled.



Water quality

The quality of rivers and bathing waters is generally improving:

- About 90 percent of rivers are now of 'fair' or 'good' water quality
- Around 85 percent of the EC designated bathing waters have met EC standards over the last three years compared to only 40 percent ten years ago

In spite of these positive signs, several river systems still need considerable improvement. The Agency is working with water companies and local authorities to ensure improvements continue.

Flooding

About 380,000 properties in the Southern region are at risk from flooding. During the 1999/2000 storms, 182 flood warnings and 72,000 automatic voice warning messages were issued – the largest public warning

issued since the Second World War. During the Autumn 2000 floods, the region received 300 percent of the normal amount of rainfall in October. Although over 1,000 properties were flooded, over 80,000 were protected. The Agency is continuing to build, improve and maintain flood defences, and develop increasingly effective flood warning systems.

Climate change

Scientists predict that the region will be particularly badly hit by climate change. Anticipated effects include a 54cm rise in sea levels by the 2080s, hotter drier summers and increasingly severe weather conditions such as floods and storms. The Agency is working to strengthen flood defences and manage water resources as effectively as possible.

See Southern Region's web pages at www.environment-agency.gov.uk/regions/southern or call 0845 9 333 111 for more information

SOUTHERN REGION ADDRESSES

REGIONAL OFFICE

Environment Agency
Guildbourne House
Chatsworth Road
Worthing
West Sussex BN11 1LD
Tel: 01903 832 000
Fax: 01903 821 832

HAMPSHIRE AND ISLE OF WIGHT AREA OFFICE

Environment Agency
Wessex Business Park
Wessex Way
Colden Common
Winchester
Hampshire SO21 1WP
Tel: 01962 713 267

KENT AREA OFFICE

Environment Agency
Orchard House
Endeavour Park
London Road
Addington, West Malling
Kent ME19 5SH
Tel: 01732 875 587
Fax: 01732 875 057

SUSSEX AREA OFFICE

Environment Agency
Saxon House
Little High Street
Worthing
West Sussex
BN11 1DH
Tel: 01903 215 835
Fax: 01903 215 884

ISLE OF WIGHT

Tel: 01983 822 986
Fax: 01983 822 985



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GENERAL ENQUIRY LINE

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