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What's happening in the South West



ENVIRONMENT
AGENCY

The South West

Snapshot of the environment

The South West's environment is one of the richest in the country, with over one third of England's Areas of Outstanding Beauty, almost half the UK's designated bathing waters, and high proportions of rare and endangered wildlife habitats. Around 15 million visitors are drawn to the South West every year, so the environment is vital not just for its own sake, but also for the contribution it makes to the region's economy and overall quality of life.

Main issues

Flooding

Although flood defences protected over 30,000 south-west properties during Autumn 2000, 550 were flooded. Current concerns include:

- A third of inland flood defences are currently in poor condition and over half of all flood banks and walls need attention
- Almost 1 in 10 planning applications for houses in 2000 were for floodplain locations
- Climate change is likely to result in more flooding

The Environment Agency is working with local authorities and the Regional Assembly to reduce flood risk by fighting floodplain development, building many new flood defences and pushing for increased flood defence funding.

The good news is:

- Coastal and inland water quality has improved significantly in recent years and is now among the country's best
- There is a rich and diverse wildlife – some species such as the otter are on the increase thanks to improved habitats
- Air quality is generally good, and improving

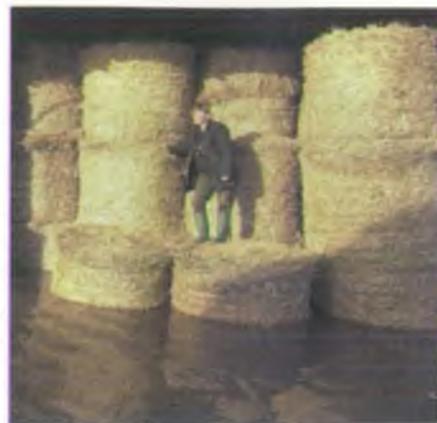
Agriculture

Farming's impacts on the region include:

- Soil erosion, which can damage water quality and fish spawning grounds
- Pollution, particularly from nitrates, phosphates and pesticides
- Certain farming practices which have impacts on flooding and flood risk
- Many farmland bird populations are in decline, often due to intensive agriculture

The Agency's work with landowners, farming groups and local authorities includes:

- Input to foot and mouth recovery plans
- Our Landcare project, which provides advice to farmers on the savings they can make from good agricultural practice
- Our work with the Maize Growers Association, which tackles soil erosion, river pollution and flooding



Waste

The South West produces more than 11 million tonnes of waste each year, 85 percent of which is sent to landfill (buried in the ground). High population growth is increasing household waste by six percent a year – twice the national average. At current rates, there will be no landfill space left in some parts of the region in six years, yet waste production will double in just 12 years. The Environment Agency is helping develop a waste strategy for the South West and supporting waste minimisation initiatives such as Horizon South West, a regional network of green business clubs.

Coastal

Threats to the South West's coastline – which includes 60 percent of England's undeveloped coast and significant areas for wildlife – include agricultural pollution, new development, erosion and rising sea levels. The region has many of the UK's cleanest bathing waters. The Agency plays a central role

in safeguarding and improving these. There is still work to be done, however – particularly reducing pollution from agriculture and addressing the implications of climate change.

Nuclear

There are six major nuclear sites in the South West: Devonport Dockyard in Plymouth, Hinkley Point A and B in Somerset, Oldbury in South Gloucestershire, Berkeley in Gloucestershire, and Winfrith in Dorset.

The Environment Agency closely monitors these sites, making sure they meet strict environmental standards. Through public meetings and surgeries, we aim to increasingly involve local communities in this process. We take a tough line when nuclear operators breach their conditions – the owners of Hinkley Point A were fined £100,000 in a recent court case.

For further information see the *Environment South West 2002* report at www.swenvo.org.uk/environment or call 0845 9 333 111

SOUTH WEST REGION ADDRESSES

REGIONAL OFFICE

Environment Agency
South West Region
Manley House
Kestrel Way
Exeter EX2 7LQ
Tel: 01392 444 000
Fax: 01392 444 238

CORNWALL AREA OFFICE

Environment Agency
Sir John Moore House
Victoria Square
Bodmin PL31 1EB
Tel: 01208 78301
Fax: 01208 78321

NORTH WESSEX AREA OFFICE

Environment Agency
Rivers House
East Quay
Bridgwater TA6 4YS
Tel: 01278 457 333
Fax: 01278 452 985

SOUTH WESSEX

AREA OFFICE
Environment Agency
Rivers House
Sunrise Business Park
Higher Shaftesbury Road
Blandford DT11 8ST
Tel: 01258 456 080
Fax: 01258 455 998

DEVON AREA OFFICE

Environment Agency
Exminster House
Miller Way
Exminster
Devon EX6 8AS
Tel: 01392 444 000
Fax: 01392 316 016



www.environment-agency.gov.uk



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