

Round up of PAV successes

A Thank You from the Environment Agency

November 2014

Since the Wandle Trust launched the Pollution Assessment Volunteer scheme – or PAV for short – in collaboration with the Environment Agency in 2013, we have had some great successes. We would like to summarise and share these with you, in a way that is not always possible during our working investigations

We would like to thank all the volunteers for your contributions to improving water quality in the River Wandle

Thank you all very much for the excellent contributions you have made to the scheme, and to improving water quality in the River Wandle through your actions. Happy to say there have been fewer pollution incidents than we forecast this year on the Wandle, and none with a major impact, so thank you all for standing by at the ready!

We want to share some of the year's successes with you, as without the input of the volunteers there would not have been so many activities impacting positively on the River Wandle.

Almost fifty people have been trained in Pollution Assessment by the Wandle Trust's Tim Longstaff. Tim or, as we like to call him, SPOC -is the Single Point of Contact (see what we did there!) with the Environment Agency for the PAVs. His lists of who lives where, their availability, and contact numbers, all spring to life when a call comes through from the EA about a Cat 3 pollution incident. Within minutes, one of you can be riverside, gathering useful information that is then fed back to SPOC and the EA.

Incident Attendance

There have been 19 incidents attended by PAVs since the scheme began. These include events as diverse as fly-tipping, purple foam, fats oils and greases (or FOG) and the river turning milky blue. All of the information you have fed back has been logged and informed the planning of pollution prevention work around the River Wandle.

Thanks to your speed in getting to the site of reported pollution, and reliable information coming back to us from you through the SPOC, we have been able to focus our work on root causes of common pollutions.

Together we have identified and now stopped pollution incidents from the following sites-

- A hand car wash whose drainage system was half demolished underground, allowing the foul sewage to discharge to the surface water system
- A large civic amenity site that didn't realise their oil interceptor (a chamber that stops oils and fuels from leaving a site via surface water run-off) had an outlet that led to the local watercourse

Other success stories include stopping large amounts of detergent wash-waters escaping through a hole in a wall to the surface water drain; floor washings from a car mechanics workshop being disposed of to the surface water system; and homes with misconnected pipes discharging direct to the river.

During the flooding events of early 2014, your help was important to us to assess the impacts of the continual storm discharges that came from Beddington sewage treatment works (STW). As you will remember, the high levels of groundwater that brought the Carshalton Grotto arm of the Wandle back to life also caused problems in the sewer network, and the STW was overwhelmed by the huge volumes of water that came into the works for around 8 weeks. This resulted in toilet waste being visible, and detectable to the nose, along the River Wandle all the way down to Earlsfield. The Wandle Trust worked very closely with us to help report changes to the river during that time, and PAV reports kept us updated when our officers were extremely busy attending flood related events and impacts all over our patch.

Regular Monitoring

As the number of incidents was (thankfully) lower than we anticipated, a regular outfall monitoring programme was set up. The outfall monitoring programme, launched in August 2013, has provided us with your regular reports of known problem outfalls. Other problems have been identified by your good observation skills and work.

One post-PAV report visit led to a pub with a kitchen sink plumbed into the surface water sewer. This misconnection was demonstrated very quickly by putting a special dye into their sink – 15 minutes later the dye was seen in the river. The pub immediately stopped using the sink in question, and had re-plumbed it within a week.

We have received almost 100 reports through this programme. You gathered intelligence for us about ongoing problems that helped us to escalate our response due to the evidence of negative impacts on the environment. Your keen observation and reporting skills identified new chronic pollutions that we have been able to trace and resolve.

Other sites where we found problems include:-

- A site where food waste was being discharged to the river via the surface water system
- Two large supermarkets whose cleaners' sinks were connected to the surface water system
- Minimising the impact of sewage pollution from a repeat blockage in the network

We worked with these site operators who were extremely co-operative in correcting drainage issues. Even with the good will of the operator responsible, issues like these can take several months to put right, depending on lease, ownership or other complications like the drain being under a main road.

Other ways your information is valuable

Some pollution cannot be traced easily by us, and we need to involve other organisations. Thames Water is responsible for most of the sewer network around the River Wandle, and run a long term investigation called the Surface Water Outfall Programme (SWOP). Usually these are outfalls showing signs of chronic pollution, such as sewage fungus, that have not been quick to resolve. The EA can request that such outfalls be put on Thames Water's Hotspots list. Your monitoring reports can keep us, and them, updated as to the current state of the outfalls on the SWOP list.

It can take many months before these are attended to by Thames Water, although we have been fortunate and Thames Water have been able to escalate investigation two of the outfalls listed as a result of the PAV reports. One is at Morden Hall Park, where SWOP work has identified numerous blockages in the network which have been cleared, and around 35 misconnected household appliances, including toilets, in the nearby streets. These are in process of being resolved, and may need the intervention of the local authority for the final few.

The future - expanding the scheme

All the information that you provide to us is valuable. We appreciate everybody's time given to respond to incidents and provide regular updates on the River Wandle.

We look forward to your new SPOC, Polly Bryant, providing as great a service as Tim did, and adding her own flourishes to the project as it develops. Thanks in advance, Polly!

We also look forward to working with even more volunteers on the Beverley Brook and River Hogsmill as Polly prepares to roll out the scheme to a wider environment.

**Many thanks to you all from the Environment Agency
South London Land and Water Team**

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