



Bexhill and Normans Bay beach pollution incident – August 2022

Response to questions raised by Huw Merriman

Summary of incident:

Galley Hill Wastewater Pumping Station (WPS), to the west of Hastings, suffered from electrical failure of its switchgear.

Following a detailed investigation into the electrical failure of the Wastewater Pumping Station, we have concluded the fault was due to a faulty storm pump which caused both restricted earth fault relays to trip which opens the high voltage breakers to the transformers.

We are awaiting our Energy Distribution Network Operator (UK Power Networks) report to better understand why the faulty pump caused the restricted earth fault relays to trip.

This incident saw an emergency release of unscreened storm water onto the beach at Bexhill lasting 151 minutes.

This was run as an emergency incident, in line with our established protocols with the local council and the Environment Agency – which were kept informed throughout.

The local team working with UKPN restored power and brought in additional temporary generation and we have now rectified the issue.

We have completed our beach inspections, and whilst we found very little sewage litter, we ensured any litter we found was safely removed.

Beaches were closed from Bexhill Beach to Normans Bay from the morning of 18 August to the morning of 20 August.

Additionally, the Environment Agency provided separate advice against bathing for the neighbouring Hastings Pelham Beach from Monday 15 August, in relation to a Pollution Risk Forecasts due to rainfall and not because of a Southern Water Discharge.

1: Can Southern Water confirm that the two discharges on 17 August from the Galley Hill site were definitely the only incidents from the site during the summer? (Reports from Lifeguards and public mention of excrement and waste being seen floating in the sea around Galley Hill on Sunday 14 August).

We have no record of an untreated wastewater release on Sunday 14 August, via our asset systems or notification from the public/lifeguards. The previous record of a release (prior to Wednesday 17 August) was in 2021.

Historic releases from Galley Hill wastewater pumping station:

- GALLEY HILL BEXHILL EMO 17/08/2022 14:45 – 17/08/2022 16:37 (lasting 151 minutes)
- GALLEY HILL BEXHILL CSO 20/10/2021 13:45 - 21/10/2021 13:57
- GALLEY HILL BEXHILL SST 17/02/2020 12:12 - 17/02/2020 21:33

Beach closures:

It was Bexhill Beach and Normans Bay beach which were closed – from the morning of Thursday 18 August, to the morning of Saturday 20 August.

Other Beach closures:

There were beach closures / advice against bathing for the neighbouring Hastings Pellham Beach from Monday 15 August. These were however in relation to a Pollution Risk Forecasts due to rainfall, issued by the Environment Agency, and not as a result of a Southern Water release.

2. Does Southern Water carry out any testing of bathing water when there is a sewage spill?

Bathing Water Samples were taken on Friday 19, Saturday 20 and Sunday 21 of August.

Ecoli modelling of the release was also carried out, which showed the pollution from the untreated wastewater had completely dissipated by the early hours of Saturday 20 August. This modelling was shared with the Environment Agency and the beach reopening on the 20 August was based on this data.

Samples taken on Friday 19 August show Ecoli levels were only slightly elevated but still within Good bathing water quality standard. Samples taken from other days will be available soon.

3. What actions were taken to close the beach to the public? There were no obvious signs at the steps onto the beaches to warn people.

Following conversations with Rother District Council on Wednesday 17 August, actions to close the beach were taken by Rother District Council as is normal practice. The following actions were carried out:

- As per Rother District Council procedures, red flags were put out to signify a risk to bathers on Thursday 18 August.
- Rother District Council displayed signage a little later on the morning of Friday 19 August.
- Rother District Council published a news bulletin on their webpage on Thursday 18 August, informing the public of the beach closure.
- We provided an email update to Bexhill MP (Huw Merriman) and East Sussex County Councillors (covering Bexhill and Normans Bay, including the Leader of the Council) on Wednesday 17 August, notifying of the decision by Rother District Council of the beach closures.

Harris, Steve 19/08 10:45

Daniel, there are now signs secured to the railings on the seafront at East and West Parade indicating beach closures. These were not in place yesterday. There has been no passing enquiring customers so far today



4. Was Hastings Borough Council contacted at the same time as Rother District Council? I understand that the sewage spill went east before changing tides.

No, Rother District Council were contacted on Wednesday 17 August, and Hastings Borough Council's Environmental Health Team were engaged with on Thursday 18 August.

The difference in timing was because:

- The pollution impact modelling didn't predict an impact as far East as Hastings.
- Hastings Borough Council had already put flags out earlier in the week – completely unrelated to the incident, in response to an Environment Agency Pollution Risk Forecast issued ahead of rainfall.

We also engaged with East Sussex County Council and the MP for Bexhill and Battle on the 17 August. On their advice we also engaged with the MP for Hastings and Rye on the 18 August. This formed a meeting between our technical team and Frances McKenna and Ella Conner on behalf of Huw Merriman and Jane Howard-Smith on behalf of Sally-Ann Hart.

5. What is the documented action plan when there is an unintended discharge from the pumping station? What other agencies are involved in the actions?

With a non-compliant release of untreated wastewater like the release on Wednesday 17 August, it is automatically responded to as an emergency incident, in line with our established protocols with the local Council and the Environment Agency – which were kept informed throughout the incident.

When we work with the EA for example, we inform them of the incident situation, impact to the environment and our plan of action. They normally advise us with any further steps necessary in order to better protect the environment.

We worked with the Energy Distribution Network Operator (UK Power Networks) from a service recovery side, as it was their equipment that had failed, causing our asset to fail. We often work with:

- Outside contractors in power issues.
- We always work alongside the Environment Agency (EA) and local councils with reference to the impact on the local environment.
- We carried out our beach inspections between Thursday 18, Friday 19 and Saturday 20 August, and whilst we found very little sewage litter, we ensured any litter we found was safely removed.

As per the emergency plan, tankering was considered but was not viable given the volume and amount of tankers required (38).

6. What is the normal maintenance plan for the treatment works?

This is a wastewater pumping station, not a treatment works.

The site is referred to as a CAT A site, meaning it's a high-risk site due to the impact that it can have on the environment, customers and communities.

These sites are normally visited by operators at least once a month. However, because of the potential impact to the environment, customers and communities from asset failure, this site is visited at least four times a week.

From an electrical and mechanical side, including pumps, motors and panels etc, it's serviced every three months.

7. I understand that the cause of the sewage discharge at Galley Hill was due to the main power transformer and backup transformer failing. Can you confirm that this is correct and also confirm when the backup transformer had last been checked to ensure it was in good working order?

Following a detailed investigation into the electrical failure of the Wastewater Pumping Station, we have concluded the fault was due to a faulty storm pump which caused both restricted earth fault relays to trip which opens the high voltage breakers to the transformers.

We have isolated the faulty pump and are currently working on the repair.

We are awaiting UKPNs report to better understand why the faulty pump caused the restricted earth fault relays to trip.

Relays are inspected every four years, in line with our maintenance plan – the relay was due to be inspected later this year.

The pumping station is at the end of the sewer, to protect the site from flooding and backing up into people's properties. The site has an emergency discharge to release to the beach/sea.

Ordinarily the pumps pump the water uphill to our treatment works or in high flows to the treatment works and storm tanks.

Next Steps – improving the sites resilience:

This site, along with 50 other sites, forms part of our Resilience First project.

These high-risk sites (based on environmental and community impact) will receive an agile intrusive health check imminently, and where necessary re-commissioning of the site's control and pumping operation, including remedial work and plant replacement.

This site has £90,000 funding allocated for remedial works.

This programme of works form part of a prior commitment made to the Environment Agency to build resilience into our Wastewater Pumping Stations and Wastewater Treatment sites in order to reduce our impact on the environment.