



River pollution

Case study

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A specialist hazardous waste disposal contractor and its director were fined and ordered to pay costs and compensation totalling £60,800 for polluting a tributary of the River Thames in 2009.

The incident nearly eradicated all fish along a four-kilometre stretch of the watercourse.

The company admitted that a leak had occurred from one of their on-site drums. There had also been a much larger spill from a road tanker being used to transport hazardous wastes, including cleaning products and liquid soaps to another site for treatment and disposal. The pollution occurred when a tanker owned by the contractor accidentally discharged approximately 4,500 litres of hazardous chemicals from a blocked valve. The tanker driver cleaned up the resulting spill by washing it down a drain which unfortunately led into the Chalvey Ditch in Chippenham.

Environment Agency officers responded and found that the stream had turned blue-grey, was covered in foam and smelled of detergent. They also found a large quantity of dead fish and other affected wildlife downstream. An investigating officer said, "The pollution had a devastating effect on the area. Thousands of fish were killed in the Chalvey Ditch along with an unknown number of invertebrates... and it may take years to recover."

This case shows how damage to protected species and natural habitats can trigger liability under the Environmental Liability Directive. An Environmental Impairment Liability policy would be needed to pick up any ensuing Complementary or Compensatory Damages.