

Dear [REDACTED],

Thank you for your request for environmental information. We appreciate your interest, and we want to let you know that your request has been carefully considered in accordance with the Environmental Information Regulations (EIR).

Your request:

I am seeking information relating to the environmental performance of United Utilities' wastewater operations between **1 January 2022 and 31 December 2024 under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004**.

Please provide the following information for each wastewater catchment, or equivalent operational catchment used by United Utilities.

1. Storm Overflow Activity

For each catchment, please provide:

- the number of storm overflow assets;
- the total number of recorded storm overflow discharge events;
- the total duration of storm overflow discharges (hours);
- the number of individual storm overflows that discharged during the reporting period;
- details of any storm overflows identified as spilling unusually frequently or subject to enhanced monitoring.

2. Pollution Incidents

For each catchment, please provide:

- the total number of pollution incidents recorded by United Utilities;
- the number of pollution incidents reported to the Environment Agency;
- the pollution category (where recorded);
- the receiving watercourse affected;
- the operational cause of each incident, where recorded (for example asset failure, blockage, hydraulic overload or equipment failure).

3. Customer Contacts

For each catchment, please provide:

- the number of customer complaints relating to:
 - water quality;
 - sewage odour;
 - sewer flooding;
 - sewage pollution;

- river pollution;
- the date each complaint was received (month and year is sufficient);
- the general location or postcode sector, where disclosure would not identify individuals;
- whether the complaint was substantiated following investigation.

4. Correlation and Analysis

Please provide any reports, dashboards, briefing papers or internal analysis produced during the period which compare or analyse relationships between:

- storm overflow operation;
- pollution incidents;
- customer complaints;
- environmental performance;
- regulatory compliance.

5. Catchments of Concern

Please provide copies of any reports or internal documents identifying catchments which have been classified as:

- high environmental risk;
- requiring enhanced operational oversight;
- requiring accelerated investment;
- subject to increased regulatory scrutiny.

6. Methodology

Please provide documentation explaining:

- how United Utilities defines catchment boundaries for reporting purposes;
- how pollution incidents are recorded and categorised;
- how customer complaints are classified and attributed to individual catchments;
- any limitations on comparing these datasets.

Our response:

1. Storm Overflow Activity

The table below outlines the total number of storm overflows currently operated by United Utilities by Catchment and County. Please note that some Catchments cross the County boundaries and so will rightly appear more than once in the table.



Water for the North West

United Utilities Water Limited
Haweswater House
Lingley Mere Business Park
Lingley Green Avenue
Great Sankey
Warrington WA5 3LP

Telephone: 01925 237000
unitedutilities.com

County	Catchment	Number of overflows
Cheshire	Mersey Estuary	66
	Upper Mersey	44
	Weaver Gowy	206
Cumbria	Derwent	82
	Eden and Esk	150
	Kent - Levens	55
	Lune	48
	South West lakes	95
	Waver Wampool	25
Lancashire	Douglas	103
	Lune	12
	Ribble	295
	Upper Mersey	10
	Wyre	43
Manchester	Douglas	3
	Irwell	327
	Mersey Estuary	65
	Ribble	25
	Upper Mersey	440
Merseyside	Alt Crossens	20
	Mersey Estuary	117
	Upper Mersey	39
		2,270

For the period outlined in the request, the table below outlines the total number of recorded storm overflow discharge events recorded by United Utilities by Catchment and County. The total equivalent spill duration (in hours) is also shown. Please note the increase seen in 2023 was partly because additional monitors had been installed to measure the sewage spills and because this was an exceptionally wet year.

As regards 'unusually high spills', please note that Spill performance is reviewed routinely throughout the year with specific focus given to frequency, duration and operability. Sites that record more than 60 spills within a calendar year require an explanation to be included within the annual regulatory EDM return which is submitted to the Environment Agency. All regulatory submissions are reviewed and assured both internally and externally ahead of the final regulatory submission. A copy of our recent returns to the EA can be found at [Event Duration Monitoring - Storm Overflows - Annual Returns - National Data Library](#).

County	Catchment	2022		2023		2024	
		Number of Spills	Duration (hours)	Number of Spills	Duration (hours)	Number of Spills	Duration (hours)
Cheshire	Mersey Estuary	1,786	10,667	2,286	16,515	2,147	12,172
	Upper Mersey	1,374	5,244	2,243	12,357	1,844	11,104
	Weaver Gowy	4,310	23,358	6,698	38,040	5,959	32,025
Cumbria	Derwent	4,955	38,962	5,605	48,949	5,404	42,678
	Eden and Esk	6,160	43,084	7,195	54,021	6,674	43,821
	Kent - Levens	2,508	30,933	3,614	49,754	3,389	43,554
	Lune	2,231	22,945	2,607	26,477	2,052	14,833
	South West lakes	3,035	18,274	3,335	23,785	3,236	19,309
	Waver Wampool	1,199	9,589	1,457	13,926	1,277	9,054
Lancashire	Douglas	3,130	13,977	4,574	23,018	3,672	17,873
	Lune	276	3,045	462	5,619	440	4,333
	Ribble	8,612	57,604	12,380	82,434	9,322	48,180
	Upper Mersey	645	2,577	1,232	7,068	1,041	4,642
	Wyre	1,314	6,527	2,205	14,664	1,625	10,497
Manchester	Douglas	118	175	129	233	78	152
	Irwell	8,690	37,697	12,875	65,154	9,530	40,386
	Mersey Estuary	2,010	15,596	2,941	21,353	2,088	15,281
	Ribble	801	3,026	930	3,507	663	1,790
	Upper Mersey	10,661	55,732	17,029	105,705	11,063	47,956
Merseyside	Alt Crossens	423	1,314	624	3,511	603	3,018
	Mersey Estuary	3,910	19,380	5,680	33,212	4,617	24,293
	Upper Mersey	1,097	5,774	1,436	6,704	1,093	3,827
		69,245	425,490	97,537	656,014	77,817	450,778

2. Pollution Incidents

The attached Appendix A outlines all the pollution incidents for United Utilities between 1 January 2022 and 31 December 2024. Column H within this spreadsheet denotes if the incident was 'self-reported' by United Utilities or reported to us by the Environment Agency. Regardless of the reporting source, the total number of incidents recorded by United Utilities and our Regulators will be the same number, which over this three-year period, was 689 pollution incidents.

Also, within this document, column A show the specific date and time of each incident, column B shows the incident category (1-3). Category 4's are not included within this dataset (see section 6 for

details on approach) as during the period 2022-2024 these pollution incidents were not included in EPA or performance commitments (although these were reported to the EA). Column C shows the watercourse type, column D the watercourse name, column E the river catchment, column F the county and column G shows the operational root cause of each incident. Please note that some of the smaller ditches, brooks and tributary streams are unnamed, so will be shown as such in the watercourse name column.

3. Customer Contacts

The attached Appendix B outlines the customer complaints we have received between 1 January 2022 and 31 December 2024 relating to water quality, pollution, sewer flooding and odour. Over this three-year period, there were 2,692 complaints received. Please note that United Utilities adopts a clear distinction between a customer 'contact' and a customer 'complaint'. A customer complaint is where the customer expresses clear dissatisfaction with our services or billing activities, which then triggers the formal complaint tracking methodology (see details in section 6).

Appendix B contains information on the date of the complaint, the stage of complaint and the issue the complaint is relating to. Complaints are mapped to customer addresses, which hold no direct correlation with catchments. As such, we have provided you with the County in which the postal address is located as an alternative proxy. Instances where the customer did not disclose their address during the complaint are identified in the County column as 'unknown'.

4. Correlation and Analysis

United Utilities' operational teams are generally organised by five counties – Cumbria, Lancashire, Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire. This helps us target and address problems and priorities at a more localised level. Dedicated resources have been assigned within each county to provide regular scrutiny, oversight and action against the spill, pollution and complaints performance, supported by key central teams. These county teams review the information from across all their operational area, as opposed to undertaking assessments on a catchment basis. There are defined routes of escalation for any issues that cannot be managed locally or require input or assistance from senior management.

United Utilities undertakes performance reporting and analysis on each of the topics outlined in the request – storm overflow operation, pollution, customer complaints and overall regulatory compliance. We are also held to account on our performance on these measures by the Environment Agency, our Environmental Regulator, and Ofwat, our Economic Regulator. Details of our performance are published on our website every year in our Annual Performance Report (APR):

[United Utilities - Performance](#)

There are no reports, dashboard or briefings papers held by United Utilities that analyse the relationships between those topic areas, as they either act as independent performance areas, or there is no consistent, singular point of comparison that makes undertaking the analysis beneficial. In line with Regulation 12(4)(a) of the EIR, we are unable to provide you with a copy of this

information, as it is not held.

5. Catchments of concern

A Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan, or DWMP, is a long-term, 25-year strategic plan published by Water and Sewerage Companies (WaSCs). Required under the Environment Act, it sets out how companies will maintain, improve and expand their drainage and wastewater systems. The DWMP maps out how companies propose to handle risks on topics such as climate change, population growth and urban development. Key goals of the DWMP include:

- Protecting the environment from sewer flooding and pollution
- Reducing storm overflow operations
- Adapting infrastructure to heavy rainfall and climate shifts
- Coordinate strategies with local councils and environmental agencies

The latest version of United Utilities' DWMP was published in May 2023 ([Drainage and wastewater management plan](#)) and the outputs can be viewed on the DWMP customer portal ([DWMP Customer Portal Environment](#)).

For each drainage/catchment area, the data presents risk/opportunities at the following design horizons:

- Current view for the drainage area (2020)
- Developing view for the drainage area (2030)
- Future view for the drainage area (2050)

For each design horizon, the drainage/catchment area is presented as being;

- No concern (forecast)
- Potential area of focus (forecast)
- Area of focus (forecast)

The Strategic Plans provide more details of the risk assessment process that has been used, the specific risks that have been identified and the proposed adaptive plans that are being followed to manage these risks.

Please note that the data used within this portal is from 2020 and was used to support the publication of the DWMP in May 2023. As such, it is not a forecast built on 2026 data. We are currently developing the next DWMP which is due to be published in November 2027 in line with regulatory requirements. These assessments inform our future business plan submissions for growth related expenditure which must then be approved by Ofwat.

6. Methodology

Catchment boundary definition

The 'catchments' described in the enclosed Appendices are those of the rivers and estuaries of the North West. These are not 'defined' by United Utilities, but instead are the application of the known geographical drainage areas of those relevant waterbodies.

As described above in section 4, United Utilities' operational teams are generally organised by five counties – Cumbria, Lancashire, Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire.

Pollution incident classification

A pollution incident is the unauthorised discharge of a substance to the environment. United Utilities utilises a pollution categorisation approach which is fully consistent with the one operated by the Environment Agency. Between 2004 and 2025, the Environment Agency classified pollution incidents using the four-point Common Incident Classification System (CICS). An overview of this EA classification system is shown in the table below.

Category	Classification	Description
Category 1	Major	Major, serious, extensive or persistent effects on people, property or the environment (such as large-scale fish kills or toxic chemical spills)
Category 2	Significant	Significant impact or localised damage affecting people, property of wildlife ecosystems
Category 3	Minor	Minor or minimal impact with low-level, short-term consequences on environmental quality or amenity value
Category 4	No impact	Substantiated incident or generalised reports where investigation confirmed that no actual impact occurred

The Environment Agency determine the final classification for each pollution incident. More details on classification, monitoring and reporting, and assurance and governance can be found in our Pollution Incident Reduction Plan (PIRP), which we publish on our website:

[Pollution Incident Reduction Plan 2026](#)

Customer complaint classification

United Utilities defines a customer complaint as being where the customer expresses clear dissatisfaction with our services or billing activities. As outlined in section 3, this differs from a general

customer contact.

Once United Utilities has received a complaint, we look to resolve the issue as soon as practicably possible. When this occurs, the complaint is coded as 'NFA', which is an acronym for 'No Further Action'. If quick resolution cannot be achieved, we follow a structured approach to complaints escalation. This escalation process is described in the table below.

Review	Stage	Description
Internal	Stage 1	The customer contacts the water company directly. The company aims to resolve minor items immediately or investigate and provide a formal first stage response in 10 working days.
	Stage 2	If the customer remains dissatisfied, they can request a stage 2 review, prompting an independent internal re-examination and a further response window of 10 working days.
External	CCW investigation	If internal procedures are exhausted, or the complaint has lasted longer than 8 weeks, customers can refer the dispute to the Customer Council for Water (CCW)
	Ofwat	For specific regulatory, infrastructure connection, or legal disputes outside general consumer service, Ofwat implements a preliminary assessment phase lasting 20 working days to determine formal legal jurisdiction and case allocation

As mentioned above in section 3, complaints are mapped to customer addresses, which hold no direct correlation with catchments, hence making direct comparisons difficult.

We hope that this response answers your request. However, if you're not satisfied with how we've handled it, you can request an internal review. To do this, please write to us at Environmental Information Office, Haweswater House, Lingley Mere, Warrington, WA5 3LP or email us at EIRRequests@uuplc.co.uk, addressing your request to [REDACTED], and explaining why you're unhappy with our response. We'll be very happy to review your request and ensure we've done everything we can to assist you.

Any request for an internal review should be made within 40 working days of receipt of this response, and we will reply within 40 working days from receipt of the request for internal review.

Many thanks

[REDACTED]

We'd love to hear your feedback on how we handled your request! If you have a moment, please complete our short survey [here](#) – your input helps us improve our service.