

Introduction

Clean, Clear Water is one of 7 objectives outlined in the Crane Valley Partnership's catchment plan. The partnership's approach to working towards this objective includes thorough data collection and analysis of pollution sources. This newsletter aims to assist with this approach by providing a brief summary of water pollution incidents in the Crane catchment over the year from 14 September 2014 to 13 September 2015. During that period a total of 28 incidents occurred that were substantiated (that is, we believed the report of an incident was genuine), and that had an impact on the water environment. The data has been extracted from our National Incident Reporting System.

Location, severity and type of water pollution incidents in the Crane catchment

The location of water pollution incidents during this period is shown on the map in figure 1.

26 of the incidents were classed as Category 3, meaning that they were judged to have caused only a minor or minimal impact to the water environment.

The types of Category 3 pollution incidents were as follows:

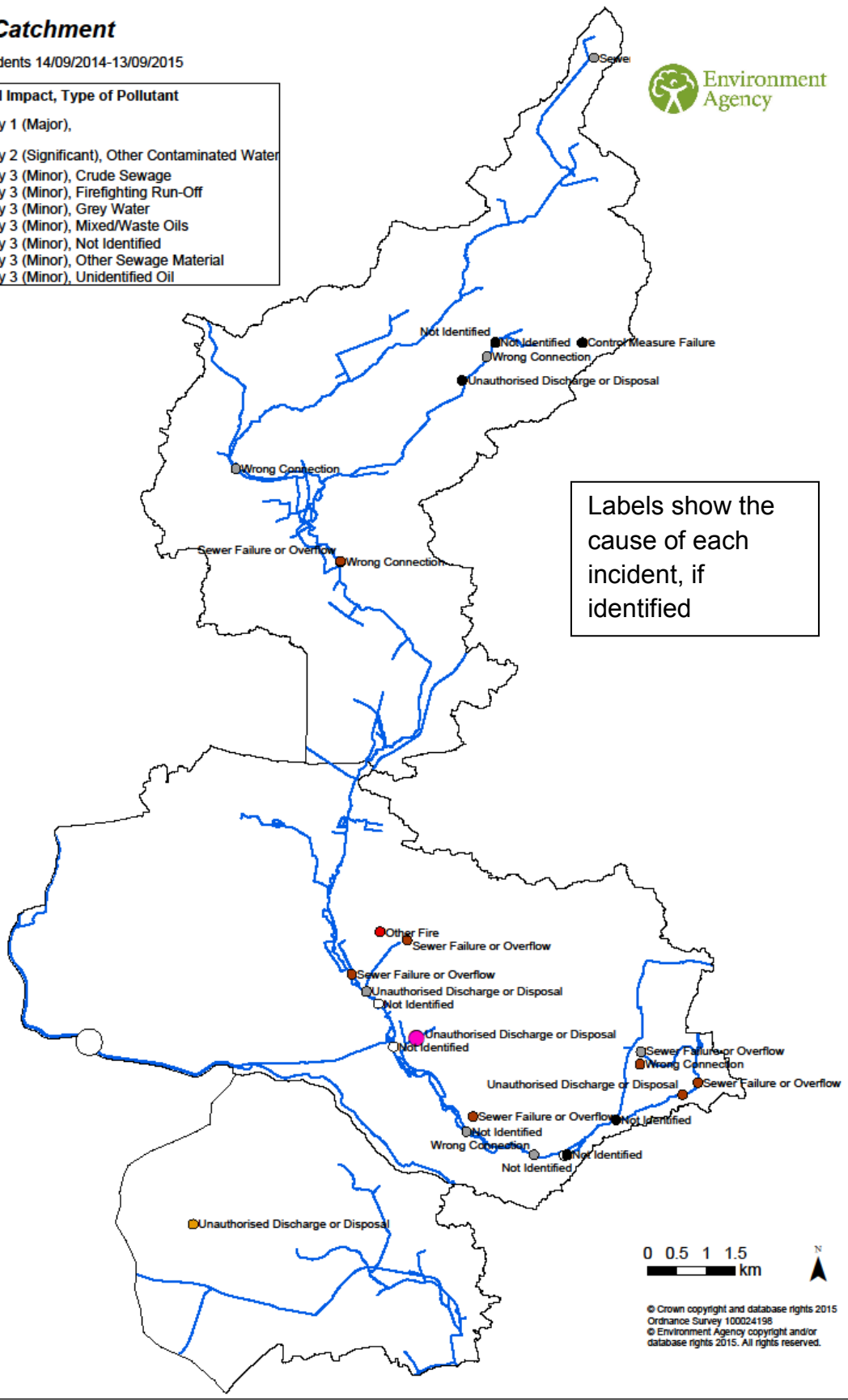
- 8 grey water
- 7 crude sewage (often caused by blockages, including a sewer blockage by concrete from a building site)
- 1 other sewage (animal faeces)
- 5 unidentified oil and 1 mixed/waste oils
- 1 firefighting run-off
- 3 where the pollutant could not be identified

Crane Catchment

Pollution Incidents 14/09/2014-13/09/2015



- Environmental Impact, Type of Pollutant**
- Category 1 (Major),
 - Category 2 (Significant), Other Contaminated Water
 - Category 3 (Minor), Crude Sewage
 - Category 3 (Minor), Firefighting Run-Off
 - Category 3 (Minor), Grey Water
 - Category 3 (Minor), Mixed/Waste Oils
 - Category 3 (Minor), Not Identified
 - Category 3 (Minor), Other Sewage Material
 - Category 3 (Minor), Unidentified Oil



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Figure 1: Water pollution incidents in the Crane catchment 14 Sept 2014 to 13 Sept 2015.

1 incident was classed as Category 2, meaning that it caused significant impact or effect on the water environment. This incident affected the Mill Stream and was caused by contaminated water from trade effluent. See the case study below for more details on this incident.

There was 1 Category 1 incident, which had a major impact on fish stocks. This was a fish kill on the Duke of Northumberland's River and the Longford River, involving approximately 8000 fish, when low dissolved oxygen levels caused the fish to suffocate after severe summer storms. The exact causes of the low oxygen levels are not known, but we saw no evidence of pollution, and it is likely that a combination of physical and meteorological factors could have been involved.

Environment Agency attendance at water pollution incidents in the Crane catchment

Due to limited resources, we are currently unable to attend all incidents where we assess the environmental risk as minor. Nevertheless, Environment Officers attended 9 of the 28 water pollution incidents. Operations staff deployed pollution control measures such as oil absorbent booms in 2 incidents, and collected carcasses in the case of the fish-kill.

Many of the incidents that we did not attend directly were attended by Thames Water or their contractors and we communicated with them during the incidents.

Enforcement action

An offence had been committed and an offender could be identified in 11 of the 28 incidents.

This resulted in the following enforcement action:

- We issued 6 warnings, where we reminded the offender of their legal duties to prevent pollution to the environment. Offenders were informed that we believed they had committed an offence, and that although we did not intend to take further action at the time, it would be recorded and could count against them if they were to reoffend.
- Further action may be taken against 1 additional offender and we are in the process of assessing a legal case.

Please be aware that for legal reasons we cannot provide further details on any ongoing investigations.

Where we did not take enforcement action, this was either because there was insufficient evidence that the incident had caused environmental harm, or it was judged not to be in the public interest, for example, when polluters informed us of small spills and took all practical steps to contain, collect and remediate the pollution.

Even when we choose not to take enforcement action, we may still provide the offender with advice and guidance. Also, where the polluter has been identified, each and every offence is recorded. Under the new Enforcement and Sanctions Guidance, previous offences will be taken into account if the polluter reoffends, and are likely to affect our enforcement response.

Case Study – Rotting Onions in the Mill Stream?

An incident was phoned in to our incident hotline in September 2014 as a result of the Citizen Crane project. The caller reported pollution to the River Crane in Crane Park coming from the Mill Stream, where the water was grey green and smelled of rotting onions. Although there were no signs of dead fish or fish in distress, plumes of sewage fungus were visible.

One of our Environment Officers attended the incident the following day. He established that the Mill Stream contained very high levels of ammonia and very low levels of dissolved oxygen. With a Thames Water engineer, he inspected the surface water drains and identified a possible misconnection from a sewer that required cleaning before further investigation. Then, working with Thames Water, he eventually traced the pollution to an illegally misconnected downpipe from a food factory, which the owner closed immediately.

When we re-inspected the site in November, we found that the factory was now properly connected and pollution was reduced.

However, the factory was on an industrial estate and was found to be only one of many sources of pollution. We organised follow-up pollution prevention visits to every business on the estate, and found 5 illegal car washes without properly functioning oil interceptors, along with several businesses with inappropriate storage of oils and chemicals. We have since been working closely with these businesses and can now report that most of the issues have been corrected. We are continuing to work with the businesses, educating them about environmental 'best practice' and encouraging them to embrace their environmental responsibilities.