What is Wessex Water doing to reduce the number of CSO spills?

Since 1995 we have spent more than £350m improving our sewerage network by:

• increasing sewer capacity
• providing extra storm storage at key points within the system
• upgrading CSOs with fine screens to reduce the amount of debris discharged
• implementing integrated drainage systems, such as ponds, lakes or soakaways, that help prevent surface water entering the sewers in the first place.

This investment has helped to reduce the number of CSO spills each year, significantly improve the quality of receiving watercourses and reduce the number of flooding events in homes and properties during storm conditions.

We continue to invest to maintain and improve our network to ensure we achieve the highest standards for our customers and the environment.

Want to know more?

If you would like to know more about CSOs or to see if bathing water quality near you may have been affected by a recent spill please visit our website:

www.wessexwater.co.uk/bathingwaters

More information can be obtained from the following organisations.

• Environment Agency
• Defra
• Marine Conservation Society
• Surfers Against Sewage

Bag it and bin it

To help prevent blockages in sewers you can do your bit by making sure you only flush human waste and toilet paper down the toilet.

Disposing of anything else can lead to blockages in sewers or your drains at home which can cause them to back up and flood.

To help prevent blockages please follow these top tips.

In the bathroom

Wrap up any sanitary products, nappies, wet wipes and condoms and put them in the bin.

In the kitchen

Don’t pour fat, oil or grease down the sink! Instead leave to cool and dispose with your household rubbish.

Around the home

All chemicals, solvents, engine oils and paints should be taken to your local refuse site for disposal.

Medical

Medicines, syringes and needles should be taken to your pharmacist or local hospital for safe disposal. For more information on the safe disposal of sharp items and medical supplies please contact your GP or local council.

Contact us

For more information contact Wessex Water’s customer service unit on

0845 600 4 600

(Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm).
Wessex Water is one of 10 regional water and sewerage companies in England and Wales. We are responsible for taking away and treating sewage from 2.7 million customers. Wastewater from homes and businesses travels through a network of sewers to one of our sewage treatment works where it is treated before being safely returned to the environment.

We treat wastewater that comes from a number of sources including dirty water from bathrooms and kitchens, rainwater from roofs and gardens and even rain runoff from some roads. Our treatment works also treat waste water from industrial processes. Every day Wessex Water treats around 480 million litres of sewage.

To achieve this we have more than:
- 17,000 kilometres of sewers
- 400 sewage treatment works
- 1,400 pumping stations
- 1,000 combined sewer overflows.

Combined sewers
The majority of the UK's sewerage systems are made up of combined sewers. Combined sewers transport wastewater from homes and industry as well as carrying surface water run off from gutters, drains and some highways.

What is a combined sewer overflow (CSO)?
Unusually heavy or prolonged rainfall can rapidly increase the flow in a combined sewer until the amount of water exceeds sewer capacity.

Combined sewer overflows (CSOs) act as relief valves within the system, allowing excess stormwater to be released to rivers or the sea. This helps protect properties from flooding and prevents sewage backing up into streets and homes during heavy storm events.

What impact do CSOs have on the environment?
As CSOs should only operate during periods of unusually intense rainfall, any foul water released from them will be very dilute because of the large volumes of rainwater within the system. Flows are further diluted by the receiving watercourses that will also be swollen by the same heavy rain. CSOs are also fitted with screens that help remove debris from the flow. Screening helps to minimise any environmental impact.

Do CSOs ever spill during dry weather?
This is very unusual but it does happen and is often caused by blockages in the sewer. Past causes of blockages have included babies’ nappies, solidified fats and oils, planks of wood and bricks.

Who monitors CSOs?
Our most critical CSOs are continuously monitored using telemetry equipment that alerts us to any spill events. Once an alarm is raised we can check whether there is a problem.

Each of our CSOs is licensed by the Environment Agency with a legally binding set of operating rules. These are in place to ensure CSOs only operate when the system is heavily surcharged by rainfall. In dry weather or during moderate rainfall the sewerage system contains the flows and directs them for treatment at local sewage treatment works.

Why do we not have separate foul and stormwater systems?
In the 19th century the combined sewer was the favoured form of construction in the UK. This is because the Victorians recognised the need for sewers to accommodate additional loading from unusually heavy rainfall events. We still have the same systems today and to replace them now would have a significant impact on bills. It would also cause considerable amounts of disruption as most sewers lie in public highways, city centres and public open spaces. Instead of replacing the system we aim to manage it by ensuring it has adequate capacity for accommodating all flows occurring under normal conditions.