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Email: john.collins@niwater.com

Your reference:

Our reference: NIW 61-10-11

Date 08 June 2010

Dear Mr Cooke,

Environmental Information Regulations 2004

Thank you for your recent request for information on the discharge into Smelt Mill Bay, near Bangor, County Down.

As your query falls under the definition of an Environmental request NI Water will be replying under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

Answering each of your questions in turn NI Water replies as follows:-

1. *What is the purpose of the discharge into the bay?*

The discharge to the bay is for two reasons:

- a. There is a risk during some heavy rainfall events that storm water will discharge from the Combined Storm Overflow (CSO) and into the discharge pipe; and
- b. there is an Emergency Relief Overflow (ERO) from Strickland's Glen Wastewater Pumping Station (WwPS). This will come into operation if there is a failure in the WwPS. These discharges are consented by Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA).

During periods of heavy rainfall there is a risk of sewers being hydraulically overloaded resulting in back-up within the system and potential out of sewer flooding. CSO's are an essential and accepted design feature of a combined system to act as a pressure relief valve thus preventing such an occurrence.

The Company is investing £1million per day in water and wastewater services. Whilst we are confident, that when this investment programme is complete, such incidents will become less common, it is also the responsibility of the public to help keep the drains and sewers in good condition by disposing of inappropriate items properly.

NI Water views the protection of the environment as a major priority and invests significant resources and measures in safeguarding it. NI Water is also the only public body in Northern Ireland to have earned International ISO 14001 status, an international standardisation award based on a company's environmental management system.

2. What is the nature of the discharge into the bay?

The discharge, potentially during some heavy rainfall events, is a combination of storm water and sewage from the CSO and foul sewage in the event of a breakdown of the WwPS.

3. How many times a year over the last five years has the discharge taken place?

The Environmental Information Regulations 2004 specify that the right of access is restricted to information held by the organisation; NI Water is therefore not required to create information it does not hold. The number of times there have been spills from the CSO is not recorded by NI Water.

There have been no failures of the WwPS in recent times that would have lead to the ERO being activated apart from an incident on 2 May 2010, when both

pumps in the station tripped, causing an overflow. This incident was caused by the pumps being blocked with inappropriate items (rags, wipes etc.) being disposed of incorrectly. NI Water reacted and had the station working again within three hours of being alerted to the fault. NI Water provides the following advice to customers, through its “bag it and Bin it” campaigns, about the dangers of dumping inappropriate items down the toilet or in the sewers.

http://www.niwater.com/siteFiles/resources/HTMLFiles/Information_Management/bag_it_and_bin_it.pdf

This activity causes blockages which are avoidable. Whilst NI Water has a responsibility for the sewerage system, everyone in Northern Ireland can help protect the environment. The advice is simple - Bag it and Bin it, don't flush it.

You have the right to request that NI Water formally review this response within forty working days of the date of this letter. If you wish to do so, please write to NI Water Information Management Unit, 15th Floor, Windsor House, 9 - 15 Bedford Street, Belfast. BT2 7LT

If after such an internal review you are still unhappy with the response, you have the right to appeal to the Information Commissioner at Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, CHESHIRE SK9 5AF, who will undertake an independent review.

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact me. Please remember to quote the reference number above in any future communications.

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Yours sincerely

John Collins

Information Manager
Northern Ireland Water