

Burlescombe WWTW storm overflow and River Culm pollution report for Parish Council

This document explains what the reported storm overflow figures show for **Burlescombe WWTW** (Wast Water Treatment Works), how this connects to the wider picture on the **River Culm**, and what parishioners can do next. It also shows how to **check current overflow status** and **report suspected pollution**.

Recent monitoring and published spill data show **frequent sewage discharges** across parts of the **River Culm** catchment, largely linked to **South West Water** assets. Burlescombe WWTW is one contributing site, discharging to **Fenacre Water**, a tributary of the Culm.

Burlescombe WWTW storm overflow summary

2024

16 spills	98.6 hours	Fenacre Water	Data from Environment Agency EDM Annual Return.
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2025

20 spills	121.28 hours	Fenacre Water	Discharges occurred during heavy rainfall events when treatment capacity was exceeded.
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*Note: Event Duration Monitoring (EDM) records **start/stop times and duration** of discharges. It does not measure the volume released.*

Environmental context (Fenacre Water → River Culm)

- **Storm overflows** are designed to prevent flooding by releasing excess rainwater mixed with sewage when treatment works reach capacity.
- **Fenacre Water**, a tributary of the River Culm, is sensitive to these discharges, which can affect downstream ecosystems.
- The **trend from 2024 to 2025 shows an increase in both spill frequency and duration**, suggesting worsening pressure on the system.
- South West Water's **WaterFit programme** aims to reduce overflow frequency through infrastructure upgrades and catchment management.

River Culm overview

Sewage spills

Top of the Poops data for **2025** shows:

- **570 sewage dumps** into the River Culm
- **6,570 hours** of sewage discharge
- Major sites include:
 - **Rewe WWTW** – 175 spills, 2,568 hours
 - **Bradinch WWTW** – 98 spills, 1,549 hours
 - **Willand WWTW** – 106 spills, 1,182 hours
 - **Culmstock STW** – 68 spills, 580 hours

[Top of the Poops](#)

Overall, these figures point to **repeated and sometimes long-running discharges**, rather than one-off incidents.

Water quality status

The **Lower Culm** water body is rated:

- **Moderate ecological status**
- **Chemical status: FAIL**
- Failures include:
 - **Mercury**
 - **PBDEs (flame retardants)**
 - **Priority hazardous substances** [Defra Data Services Platform](#)

In the catchment assessment, sewage discharge is listed as one of the **reasons the water body is not achieving good status**.

What can parishioners do?

If you suspect an active discharge or see signs of pollution, you can (1) **check live/near-real-time overflow status** in the relevant dashboards, and (2) **report the incident** to the Environment Agency using the routes below.

How to report Fenacre Water / River Culm pollution (sewage, dead fish, smells, discoloration)

Environment Agency incident hotline

[0800 80 70 60](tel:0800807060) — 24-hour service

This is the official number for reporting:

- **Sewage pollution**
- **Dead fish or fish gasping for air**
- **Chemical smells or unusual colours**
- **Oil, foam, or scum.**
- **Any sudden change in river flow or appearance**

[GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk)

Online reporting (England)

You can also report pollution online via the EA's official service:

Report water pollution online.

The service allows you to report:

- Sewage spills
- Farm runoff
- Industrial discharges
- Pollution from vehicles or objects in the river

[GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk)

Since **May 2025**, the Environment Agency has expanded online reporting to make it faster and easier.

[Engage Environment Agency](https://www.gov.uk/engage-environment-agency)

What you will need to provide

- **Exact location** (nearest bridge, village, postcode, or map pin)
- **Time you noticed the pollution.**
- **Description** (colour, smell, dead fish, sewage debris, etc.)

- **Photos** (optional but very helpful — requires email if reporting online)
[GOV.UK](#)

Who *not* to contact.

For river pollution incidents, the Environment Agency is the right contact. Local councils generally deal with issues such as litter, fly-tipping, and noise rather than water pollution.

[GOV.UK](#)

Sources.

- Top of the Poops (River Culm waterway page)
- Defra Environment / Catchment Planning Data Services Platform (Lower Culm water body status and reasons)
- Floodmapper station page (Uffculme WWTW monitoring station)
- GOV.UK: Report an environmental problem / Report water pollution (Environment Agency)
- Engage Environment Agency online reporting portal.
- Environment Agency / Rivers Trust sewage spill map (EDM publication)
- South West Water WaterFit Live and the National Storm Overflow Hub (near-real-time status)