

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). As your request contained a number of specific questions, this response, restates each part of the request (in bold) and then follows this with our response.

I am writing to request information under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

Please provide the following information relating to sewage discharges into the River Mersey and its connected estuary within your operational area:

Firstly, I would like to explain the difference in discharges. United Utilities' wastewater treatment works (WwTW) discharge continuously within our permit conditions, and this is generally treated, final effluent (unless there is an asset failure). We do not measure the volume or frequency of these discharges, as this is not a requirement of the permits.

Under strict conditions, and with the permission of the Environment Agency (EA), water companies like United Utilities are legally allowed to spill excess rainwater and wastewater into rivers and the sea because it is accepted there is a finite capacity inside sewer pipes. Even if a sewer is completely unobstructed, there could still be times when storm waters completely fill them. After heavy rainfall, groundwater can infiltrate into combined sewers, adding to the amount of water in the pipe and increasing the chance that a spill may occur. Spills can also come from storm overflows in emergency situations, for example, when equipment fails. Whilst we measure the frequency of storm overflow discharges, we do not measure the volume of these as it is not a requirement of the permits.

1. The total volume (in litres or cubic metres) of sewage discharged into the River Mersey for each of the last five calendar years 2020-2025

Our permits set out regulatory requirements for treatment and discharge of effluent and stormwater. They are available from the Environment Agency public register <https://environment.data.gov.uk/public-register/view/index>. There is no requirement to measure the volume of discharge under the environmental permits. We therefore do not hold this data and are unable to provide it in accordance with Regulation 12(4)(a) EIR.

2. A list of all discharge locations (including storm overflows and wastewater treatment works) that have released sewage into the River Mersey over this period.

All treated wastewater discharges are permitted, and the locations are available in the permits that



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

can be found on the Environment Agency public register <https://environment.data.gov.uk/public-register/view/index>. For storm overflows the information is also included in our Event Duration Monitoring (EDM) Returns which are publicly available in the drop down on our corporate website: [Storm overflow performance | United Utilities](#). The most recent return for 2025 can be found on the Environment Agency website: [Event Duration Monitoring - Storm Overflows - Annual Returns](#). This EDM return contains details on each discharge including location and duration (this can be filtered to select the River Mersey discharges).

- 3. For each discharge location, a yearly breakdown (for the last five years) of: 2020-2025**
 - **The total volume of sewage discharged; and**

Please see our response to your first point.

- **Where volume data is not available, the total number of discharge events and total duration (in hours).**

Please see our response to your second point as regards storm overflows. Please note that treated wastewater discharges are continuous.

- 4. Details of the methodology used by United Utilities to estimate or measure discharge volumes at these locations.**

As set out in our response to your first point, we do not measure discharge volumes for continuous treated wastewater discharges or storm overflow discharges. We do however measure durations of spills for storm overflows. It may be helpful for you to understand the methodology as to how we measure duration for overflow spills. This information is also publicly available on the [Storm overflow performance | United Utilities](#) page of our website. The methodology is broken down into five steps, which I have summarised below for ease.

1. All 2,264 of our overflows have sensors. Each sensor captures data signals every 15 minutes of every day. At this stage, we capture data signals that suggest spills may have occurred. This means data at this stage includes all data, with no erroneous results removed.
2. Stage two of the process is where we convert sensor data into the number of days a storm overflow has operated. We take data from every sensor and present it in 15-minute intervals. This ensures consistency across all water companies. Rules for this step are set out by the Water Industry Research Council.
3. The Environment Agency requires reporting in days, not minutes. As such, data is converted from 15-minute intervals into daily time periods i.e. how long each storm overflow operated during a 24-hour period.
4. During stage four, thorough checks are required to ensure the data is complete and accurate. The process we follow to compile the data is reviewed by an external auditor and then shared with the Environment Agency. We ensure this process is carefully managed and data errors are removed, for example, sensors can be triggered incorrectly due to power cuts.



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5. Finally, data is submitted to the Environment Agency in a standard format once a year, which we use to inform investment plans and prioritise the overflows to tackle. This data is then published on [Storm overflow performance | United Utilities](#) circa April of each year.
5. **Any internal or published reports summarising sewage discharges into the River Mersey during this period.**

You can find information summarising sewage discharges into the River Mersey via the following reports.

We make a five-yearly submission to Defra called the Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan (DWMP). This is a long-term, 25-year strategic plan that sets out how we will maintain, improve, and expand our drainage and wastewater systems, to ensure resilient and robust infrastructure for the North West. You can find our current DWMP via the below links. This is published every five years, with the next DWMP (DWMP28) due to be published in November 2027.

- [Drainage and wastewater management plan](#)
- [spa_08-mersey-estuary-dwmp.pdf](#)
- [Microsoft Word - SPA_11 Upper Mersey DWMP.docx](#)

Every five years, water and sewerage undertakers such as United Utilities create a business plan for the next AMP, which sets out how a company intend to invest in, operate and improve its water and wastewater services over the next five years. The plan covers aspects such as infrastructure upgrades, environmental protection, customer service improvements, resilience to climate change, and financial efficiency. Copies of the full business plan, as well as the Merseyside specific plan can be accessed via the below links.

- [Our business plan submissions for 2025/26 – 2029/30 | United Utilities](#)
- [31899-UU-Customer-Summary-Merseyside-300923.pdf](#)
- [UUW06 Chapter 6: Delivering social and environmental value \(section 6.4\)](#)

This element of your query is very broad, but collectively the 2023 DWMP and latest Business Plan will be the culmination of any technical work, within the period of your query, to understand impacts and investment needs for discharges into the Mersey. If you are after something more specific, please let us know.

For awareness, the Environment Agency (EA) also take and publish water quality sample data on its website: [Map Explorer | Water Quality Explorer](#). To use this platform, you can either search for the area you're interested in using the search bar at the top of the map or use the filter option on the lefthand side of the map. You can also select the type of sample point you're interested in. Alternatively, you can view any investigations, challenges or objectives set out by the EA relating to the Mersey here: [MERSEY | Catchment Data Explorer | Catchment Data Explorer](#).



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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

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.