

# WATER POLLUTION and WATER QUALITY FAQs

## 1) Who are SCRT?

SCRT is a small independent environmental charity dedicated to protect, conserve, monitor and where possible rehabilitate the aquatic environments of South Cumbria. Here at SCRT, we are working hard to ensure water quality is taken seriously and continue to make improvements to our local watercourses.

We are an on the ground delivery organisation that is making improvements to our watercourses and have been since our inception in 2006.

We hope more people join the Rivers Trust movement and support their local rivers trusts in order to help their local rivers start to breathe again.

## 2) Who are The Rivers Trust?

The Rivers Trust are our umbrella organisation but they are their own charity. The Rivers Trust supports 63 local, independent rivers trust charities.

Did you know that The Rivers Trust are part of an #EndSewagePollution collation? With the support of local rivers trusts, they are working with MPs to pass the Sewage Bill, to put pressure on water companies to stop polluting our watercourses with sewage discharge. See their campaign here: <https://www.theriverstrust.org/key-issues/sewage-in-rivers>

## 3) What are the different types of pollution?

Water pollution takes various forms, including chemical, agricultural, untreated sewage, treated sewage, industrial, oil, highways incidents and so on.

## 4) What are the different sources of pollution?

There are two types of pollution sources, point source and diffuse pollution. Point source pollution is a pollution event at a specific site such as a pipe discharge. Diffuse pollution is much more varied as it occurs when substances leach into surface waters and groundwater as a result of surface runoff, soil infiltration and rainfall.



## 5) What effects can pollution have on a watercourse?

When single point and various forms of diffuse pollution combine, they can have a debilitating effect on water quality through nutrient loading. The main nutrient pollutant of focus in our area is phosphate which is found in many things like fertilisers, cleaning products and human sewage. Phosphates are a proxy for algae levels and it's increased loading into our watercourses. Increased nutrients lead to an increase in algal blooms and Cyanobacteria (i.e. Toxic blue-green algae, which are a risk to health). Nutrient loading has much wider implications for the general health and function of the lake, as the decomposition process of algal matter consumes oxygen from the water, needed for wildlife to survive. Climate change is also compounding this effect through rising temperatures, as algae grows more rapidly in higher temperatures.

## 6) I want to test my local watercourse. Should I carry out my own water sampling?

We strongly advise members of the public to not take water samples from watercourses suspected of pollution discharge for their own health and safety. Individuals working with wastewater for example, require appropriate training and vaccinations to ensure they are covered against illness and disease. Algal blooms can be reported on the Bloomin Algae app that can be accessed on the [CEH website](#).

Should you suspect a pollution event follow the steps in question 9 of this FAQ sheet.

## 7) Can SCRT take water samples on my behalf?

SCRT carry out basic water sampling and analysis for phosphate and ammonia for specific areas as part of ongoing water quality projects, monitoring programmes and interest sites as we do not have the capacity or the resource to carry out sampling at all sites in the catchment. Phosphate and ammonia are only indicators of a pollution event and they do not provide details about the cause or source of pollution. For sewage discharge events for example, e-coli sampling would need to be carried out and SCRT cannot carry out this type of testing. It can be done in some laboratories, however there is a major expense and funding would need to be sought.

## 8) What is a Bathing Water Status and will it help improve the water quality of a watercourse?

A bathing water is classed as a coastal or inland water that attracts a large number of bathers.



Bathing waters are monitored for risk to human health so they are sampled for Faecal Indicator Organisms (FIOs) but not currently phosphates, which can contribute to toxic algal blooms. FIOs can come from a range of sources including sewage but also septic tanks and slurry/agricultural outputs. As a consequence, the classification of a bathing water can vary more frequently, particularly in response to weather conditions.

Successfully classifying a watercourse or section of a watercourse as a bathing water will ensure a watercourse is tested for FIOs. For individuals/groups that are wanting to apply for Bathing Water Status for their local watercourse, you can look at the [Sewage Map](#) created by The Rivers Trust to inform you of sewage pollution events that have occurred from sewage treatment works. As a small charity our capacity is limited but we would be happy to support/answer questions about your local watercourse if needed. You can also find information about your local watercourse and its Water Framework Classification on the gov.uk website. The Water Framework Classification is a classification given to a watercourse for its ecological status and water quality.

### **9) What do I do if I suspect a pollution event?**

Firstly, you need to contact the Environment Agency (EA) on their pollution hotline to log the event on 0800 80 70 60. The EA are the regulatory authority for pollution events. Find out more [here](#).

Try and provide them with as much information as possible; location including grid reference (you can find this using a Grid Reference Finder), date, time, details about the water including river levels and weather patterns, what you see, what you smell and take photographs if you can.

After this, you can now go to the SCRT website and log your incident on our recently developed water quality reporting map. We are not a regulatory authority like the Environment Agency but we are concerned about the ongoing pollution effecting our watercourses. Using the same information you provide the EA, you can log your event with us and see other events locally. This map will be available for everyone to access, unlike events reported to the EA and this information will be used to drive improvements locally.

You can also explore our website to find out how you can support your local river; find out what SCRT do on a daily basis to tackle these issues and how you can help us.

### **10) Why should I report my incident on the SCRT website if I have already reported it to the EA?**

Pollution events reported to the Environment Agency are not visible to the public.



By creating an incident reporting platform for South Cumbria, we will now be able to access and interact with information relating to pollution events occurring at a local level. You will also be able to see how your incident sits within the wider picture of South Cumbria, this can help add evidence to any case.

### **11) What will SCRT do with this information?**

SCRT are Catchment Hosts of the [Catchment Partnership](#), a collaborative partnership consisting of people and organisations committed to making environmental improvements in South Cumbria. The pollution incidents highlighted on our water quality map will be taken on a quarterly basis to the Catchment Partnership, where a plan for collaborative and targeted improvements will be sought where possible.

### **12) What are SCRTs long term goals for water quality?**

Our long-term aims are to ensure all watercourses in South Cumbria are of good or better ecological status. This may mean establishing water protection zones or phosphate vulnerable zones that ensure restrictions are placed on practices that ensure better protection for our watercourses; much like Nitrogen Vulnerable Zones (NVZs, rules must be followed about the use of certain fertiliser use and storage). We are also trialing new technology to reduce phosphates from septic tanks and working with local communities to ensure septic tanks are properly maintained and emptied. Evidence provided in the water quality map will help inform these conversations, driving improvements and changes to this current process

We have already started looking into biodiversity offsetting as a tool to offset impacts on water quality and how we can encourage sustainable tourism to ensure improved water quality. By getting involved with action to protect your watercourse you will be contributing to ensuring improved protections for our watercourses against elevated nutrients which are threatening our local wildlife, bathing waters and overall water quality.

### **13) What can you do?**

There are so many things you can do to support SCRT and your local rivers/watercourse.

Get to know your river/beck/lake – Use them, go on walks, take pictures; the more you interact with a watercourse the more likely it is you will be able to spot changes/incidents that occur. Report any incidents via the links above.

Small changes do make a difference – By changing how we interact with water, from the kitchen sink to the toilet, we can help reduce pollution that puts pressure on our watercourses.



Maintenance – By properly maintaining your septic tank and checking misconnections in your home, you can make a big change to your local watercourse.

Support SCRT – You can fundraise, donate or volunteer with us. Help protect your local watercourse from diffuse pollution and nutrient loading and support the work we are doing to make improvements on the ground.

Create or join a group - There are local river associations that have been set up by keen volunteers committed to making improvements to their local watercourse/s. SCRT support and work with these groups by providing expertise, knowledge, publicity and equipment for events/volunteer activities.

Kent Catchment Partnership  
Duddon Rivers Association  
River Bela Association (Milnthorpe Anglers)  
Windermere and Leven Association  
Coniston and Crake Catchment Partnership

See our website for further information about the work they do:  
<https://scrt.co.uk/our-area/>

