# Concerns rise over sewage spills affecting North Norfolk's Blue Flag beaches



Data from the Environment Agency has revealed that untreated wastewater was discharged into the coastal waters of North Norfolk for over 2,500 hours in the past year, raising significant concerns about the potential impact on the region's Blue Flag beach status. Beaches including West Runton, East Runton, and Mundesley experienced notable increases in sewage spills during 2024, prompting fears of further incidents during the summer months if heavy rainfall occurs.

The sewage releases mainly resulted from storm overflows, which are designed to prevent sewer backups and resultant flooding by allowing untreated sewage to flow into rivers and the sea during extreme rainfall events. The figures indicate that Cromer's main sewage works contributed over 500 hours of spills into the North Sea, with a total of 91 spill events recorded. A direct outfall on West Runton beach itself experienced 116 hours of sewage discharges across 32 incidents, showing a stark increase from the previous year's combined 138.26 hours at this and a near coastal site.

Last June, East Runton beach had to close for several days due to a sewage pollution incident. Mundesley reported an outfall with 87 spills lasting a total of 371 hours and one on the beach responsible for two spills amounting to 6.7 hours. Notably, more than 1,500 hours of sewage were released into the River Stiffkey, close to where it flows into the coastal waters near the villages of Stiffkey and Morston. Wells also reported 30 hours of spills over the reporting period.

In contrast, Sheringham and Weybourne beaches recorded no sewage spills, while two other outfalls near Cromer exhibited minor discharges of under one hour. Overall, the data indicates a rising trend in sewage spills across Norfolk for the previous year.

North Norfolk boasts four Blue Flag-awarded beaches: Cromer, East Runton, Sheringham, and West Runton. The Blue Flag certification is awarded to beaches that meet rigorous quality and safety standards. Additionally, Mundesley and Sea Palling hold Seaside Awards, a designation similar to that of the Blue Flag.

Tim Adams, the leader of North Norfolk District Council, acknowledged the situation by stating, “This proves there is still an awful lot of infrastructure work needed. We have been concerned about our Blue Flag beaches and about Mundesley and West Runton particularly.” He further expressed confidence in retaining the Blue Flag status, noting that the area has been fortunate thus far with minimal rainfall.

Anglian Water, which oversees water management in the region, has announced a commitment to invest £1 billion in addressing sewage spills as part of an overall £11 billion enhancement plan. A spokeswoman for the company commented on the increases in storm overflow data while attributing them to extreme weather conditions and persistent flooding that affected the region in early 2024, leading to nearly 50% of the reported spills.

However, customers of Anglian Water are expected to face an increase in their water bills as a result of these planned investments. Local MP Steffan Aquarone expressed his discontent regarding the expected hikes, describing the discharge figures as "disgraceful." He highlighted the need for improvements in both the rural and coastal sewage infrastructure and called for stricter regulation of the water industry, which he claimed profits from pollution.

As the summer approaches, the situation remains a critical focus for local authorities, the community, and environmental advocates, with the status of North Norfolk’s beaches and public health hanging in the balance amid rising concerns about sewage management in the area.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/anglian-water-fined-300000-for-sewage-pollution-in-norfolk> - This article details Anglian Water's recent fine for sewage pollution, highlighting the company's management of sewage incidents and its investments in infrastructure to reduce pollution. It supports the mention of Anglian Water's commitment to improving sewage management in the region.
* <https://theriverstrust.org/key-issues/sewage-in-rivers> - The Rivers Trust provides data on sewage discharges into rivers across England and Wales, including the effects of storm overflows, which are relevant to the situation in North Norfolk. It supports the claim about rising trends in sewage spills due to storm overflows.
* <https://www.blueflag.global/blue-flag-criteria> - This URL explains the rigorous quality and safety standards required for a beach to be awarded the Blue Flag certification. It supports the description of North Norfolk's Blue Flag-awarded beaches and the importance of maintaining these standards.
* <https://www.seasideawards.org.uk/> - The Keep Britain Tidy website discusses Seaside Awards, which are similar to Blue Flags. It supports the information about Mundesley and Sea Palling holding these awards, indicating their quality and safety standards.
* <https://www.anglianwater.co.uk/about-us/our-performance/storm-overflows/> - Anglian Water's webpage on storm overflows provides details about how they work and the efforts being made to reduce their impact. This supports the discussion of Anglian Water's infrastructure improvements and the challenges posed by storm overflows in the region.