



Water companies' contribution to the environment

Most of us know that our water bill covers the cost of treating rainwater, and water stored in underground aquifers, so that it is of a good enough quality for us to drink safely. In fact, our drinking water is more than just 'good enough', it's the best in Europe.

But our bill doesn't just cover the water that we use for drinking, washing and watering the garden. Whenever we flush the loo, when we put a load of washing on, or when we do the washing up, the water we use is taken away through the drains and sewers, cleaned, treated, and returned to the environment, cleaner than ever before.

As the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs recently agreed, it is thanks to water industry investment that our waterways are cleaner than they have been for decades and that otters, salmon and trout are now to be found again in our rivers. Seals have been spotted from the Mersey to the Thames.

Water bills also cover the cost of the water industry's vital role in protecting and caring for the unique and diverse landscape and wildlife of the British Isles.

Water companies protect the environment because it is the right thing to do, because customers and local communities tell us it is important, and because having good quality supplies of water in the future depends on us all taking good care of the environment.

As major landowners, water companies manage tens of thousands of acres of land and do so in a way that ensures that the water that is abstracted from their rivers is of as good a quality as possible before it gets to treatment works. This reduces the need for energy-intensive chemical treatments and helps to keep customers' bills down.

Cleaner beaches are also a key demonstration of the water industry's contribution to the environment. Not only do they support fragile and unique ecosystems, but they are an essential part of the economy for our many seaside towns. While companies are only part of the story (for example, pollution from agricultural land can be a big problem in some areas), the industry has made great efforts to clean up beaches and provide better information to those for

whom this is an important issue, for example introducing real-time information on beach cleanliness through text and internet services.

With an increasing population and changing weather patterns, making the most of the water we have is essential. Companies work hard with their customers to help them use water as wisely as possible, and customers have taken this message on board, not only in times of drought but also when water is freely available. Customers in the south and east of England saved significant amounts of water during the spring and summer of 2012.

Central to the industry's operations are the dual aims of not only reducing expensive energy costs but also reducing the impact of the carbon this produces. Many water and sewerage companies are investing heavily in anaerobic digestion technologies which use waste to produce heat and power. Others are looking at solar and hydro schemes.

Companies with reservoirs invest significant amounts to make them attractive to wildlife and also use them to provide their customers and communities with leisure and tourism opportunities, such as fishing and boating. In this way, they bring considerable benefits to the local economy.

Companies work with local conservation charities such as the RSPB and the National Trust and contribute towards their work to make the most cost-effective use of the money they have, while supporting the communities they serve.

Companies have been discussing their future plans with their customers and stakeholders over recent months, to ensure that their business plans for 2015 -20 are focussed on customer priorities.

This engagement with customers has shown that customers value the environmental role that water companies play on their behalf, and support further environmental improvements – but also that the pace of environmental improvements must be balanced with the impact on customers' bills. Water companies will be looking to deliver future environmental improvements as efficiently as possible, to keep bills as low as possible for customers.

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