

## Routine maintenance factsheet

This factsheet has been developed for Parish and Town Councils to explain what the Environment Agency's responsibilities are, the maintenance activities we may carry out in your area and actions you can take to help address flooding. We are keen to work in partnership with councils and others to reduce flood risk in your local area.

### What the Environment Agency does

The Environment Agency is a government agency set up to create better places for people and wildlife and support sustainable development. Our responsibilities are wide ranging and include: -

- managing the risk of flooding from main rivers, reservoirs, estuaries and the sea
- regulating major industry and waste
- treating contaminated land
- water quality and resources
- regulating fisheries
- inland river, estuary and harbour navigations
- conservation and ecology

### Routine maintenance

We undertake routine scheduled maintenance along main rivers and sea defences to help reduce flood risk to people and property. Typical activities involve cutting the grass, weed control, removing obstructions from rivers and operating sluice gates and pumping stations. These all form part of a planned yearly maintenance programme which we regularly review. Maintenance is carried out by Environment Agency teams, but also by hired contractors and local Internal Drainage Boards on our behalf.

Our powers to carry out maintenance work are permissive (discretionary) and therefore we have no obligation to exercise these powers unless we are the landowner. We do have a limited budget for maintenance. Works are carried out where they are justified, taking into account the benefits in protecting people and property and ensuring the most effective use of tax payers' money.



### Why is it important to maintain defences?

Defences such as grassed embankments (those designated a flood defence) play a vital role in protecting people, property, and businesses from flooding. Maintaining embankments

regularly helps ensure the integrity of the banks is not compromised, which reduces flood risk. Maintaining continuous grass cover on an embankment helps protect and bind it, providing a more resilient surface.

We do cut back vegetation on embankments in order to inspect flood defences fully and identify early signs of damage. We also remove vegetation and obstructions from within river channels which helps the water to flow naturally.

We also carry out works to control invasive species such as Japanese Knotweed if such species will increase flood risk or prevent our assets from operating effectively.

### When are the best times to undertake maintenance?

We carry out the majority of grass cutting on main rivers between August and September after the bird nesting season. We do carry out grass cutting at other times during the year to ensure safe access for our teams and machinery. On sea defences, we carry out regular grass cuts throughout the year. Over the winter months, we also remove and thin out woody vegetation (bushes, trees) from embankments to deter vermin and preserve good grass cover.

Our maintenance programmes are scrutinised by colleagues who are specialists in conservation and biodiversity. There is however a balance to be struck - while we do all we can to benefit wildlife, our primary objective when maintaining flood defences is to protect lives and livelihoods.

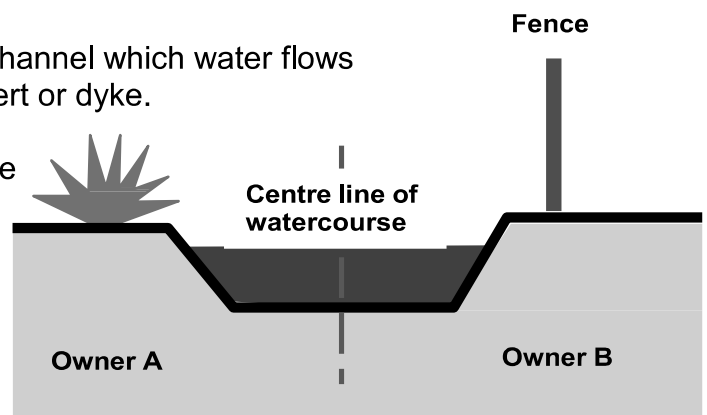
All maintenance operations will have some impact on the environment. We endeavor to select the most appropriate options to minimize the impact for each individual site.

### Responsibilities of watercourse owners

While we have a role to undertake maintenance, owners of watercourses also have a responsibility to undertake their own maintenance.

A watercourse includes any natural or artificial channel which water flows through, such as a river, stream, ditch, cut, culvert or dyke.

If a landowner's boundary is along a watercourse it is assumed their land extends to the centre of the channel and they are responsible for its maintenance (riparian ownership). The landowner on the opposite side of the watercourse is responsible for the other half. Please see diagram.



If a landowner owns the land on both sides of the watercourse, they are responsible for all maintenance.

Some guidance to explain the responsibilities of a riparian owner:

- Let water flow naturally without obstruction - do not throw garden waste into a watercourse. Remove any blockages.
- Prevent pollution – do not throw waste water or chemicals into the water.
- Protect wildlife living on the watercourse – do not disturb birds and their nests.

We can support riparian owners with advice and guidance on their maintenance responsibilities. More information can be found on our website [www.gov.uk/guidance/owning-](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/owning-)

[a-watercourse](#) or please contact us using the contact details on the next page.

### Understanding flood risk in your area

It is important to understand local flood risk and what individuals can do to mitigate this.

- Find out if your area is at risk of flooding [www.gov.uk/check-if-youre-at-risk-of-flooding](http://www.gov.uk/check-if-youre-at-risk-of-flooding)
- If your area is at risk, encourage people to sign up to receive free Flood Warnings. This is really easy to do. Just call Floodline on 0345 988 1188 or do it online [www.gov.uk/sign-up-for-flood-warnings](http://www.gov.uk/sign-up-for-flood-warnings).
- All the current warnings that have been issued can be seen here <https://flood-warning-information-service/warnings>.
- It is also possible to monitor your local river levels here <https://flood-warning-information.service.gov.uk/river-and-sea-levels>.
- Individuals can think about creating a Flood Plan with actions to take to help reduce the impact of any flooding. Templates for individuals, communities and businesses can be found here [www.gov.uk/prepare-for-flooding/future-flooding](http://www.gov.uk/prepare-for-flooding/future-flooding). People can also call Floodline for a hard copy to be sent to them.
- People should consider preparing an emergency bag of essential items. This might include spare glasses, waterproof coat, medication, water, food, insurance documents and pet food. Hand sanitiser and a face covering could be considered too.
- Think about flood products - air brick covers, flood gates. Alternatives include putting soil in bags to go across doorways.

### Contact information

If you have concerns or questions raised by residents in your parish/town, please do get in touch with us using the appropriate contact information below.

### Incident Hotline - 0800 80 70 60 (24-hour service)

Call this number to report any of the following incidents:

- flooding
- blockages which could cause flooding from main rivers
- pollution
- unusual changes in the flow of water
- collapsed or badly damaged flood defences (river or sea)

### General enquiries

National Customer Contact Centre  
PO Box 544  
Rotherham  
S60 1BY  
United Kingdom

Email - [enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk)

Telephone - 03708 506 506 (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm)

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