

EA THAMES

# What's happening in Thames Region





ENVIRONMENT  
AGENCY

# Thames Region

## Snapshot of the environment

Almost a quarter of the population in England and Wales lives in the Thames Region, creating intense pressure on the natural environment. The demand on land for homes, office, and other development is reflected in the number of planning applications received – more than 100,000 a year. There has been increased pressure on the region's water resources and poor air quality in London due to traffic emissions. On a more positive note, the region is rich in rivers, canals, lakes and flooded gravel pits, many of which are home to a range of wildlife. Otters are now resident again in the

## Main issues

### Wildlife

The Environment Agency plays a key role in enhancing biodiversity in the region. It has already drawn up action plans for 15 priority species such as the European otter, water vole, marsh warbler and glutinous snail. Habitat action plans have been prepared for chalk rivers and coastal salt marshes.

Careful management of wildlife habitats is already paying off – for example, a revival of the rare club-tailed dragonfly is expected. Other good news includes the construction of 'fish passes' on all the weirs between London, Reading and the River Kennet, enabling adult salmon access to suitable spawning and nursery habitats for the first time in 160 years.

Thames region and bitterns are thought to have bred here for the first time in many years.

The good news is:

- Increased river flows and improved river water quality have been achieved across the region
- Since 1990, emissions of all pollutants have fallen
- The quality of bathing waters is generally improving
- Maintenance standards at sewage treatment works have improved

### **Water quality**

The water quality of rivers in Thames Region is generally good, with only one percent rated 'poor'. The region's 14 designated EC bathing waters are also becoming cleaner and this trend is expected to continue. Surveys show that water quality in the region is closely linked to river flows, with below average river flow coinciding with poorer water quality.

### **Water resources**

Water resources are under huge pressure from the region's large population. During dry summer months, many river flows now consist of over 90 percent treated sewage. Over the last few years, the amount of water used has fallen but this is mainly due to reduced water leakage by water companies. Demand for water is expected to continue rising.



### **Waste**

Around 7 million tonnes of household waste is produced in the region every year. Most of this is disposed of in landfill sites, and only ten percent is recycled or composted. The current growth in population, the reducing size of household units and new housing developments mean that household waste levels are likely to continue rising. Over the next two decades EU legislation will drastically reduce the amount of household waste that can be landfilled, however. This is why some local authorities are considering building new waste incinerators. The Environment Agency is urging that less waste is produced and much more is recycled.

### **Air quality**

There are major air quality problems in London where heavy traffic creates high levels of nitrogen dioxide and particulates. To the east of London, the Agency keeps a close eye on the levels of sulphur dioxide emitted by local power stations and a refinery. Working



closely with industry, the Agency is helping to ensure that polluting emissions in the region continue to fall.

## Flooding

Increased development on floodplains, higher flow levels in the Thames and climate change are likely to increase river flooding in winter. Since 1990 Thames Barrier closures against tidal surges have increased and this is expected to continue due to rising sea levels. In Autumn 2000, more than 400 properties were flooded.

The Environment Agency is:

- Building, improving and maintaining flood defences, and developing increasingly effective flood warning systems
- Working with local authorities to minimise the impact of further developments in the flood plain

See Thames Region's web pages at [www.environment-agency.gov.uk/regions/thames](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/regions/thames) or call 0845 9 333 111 for more information

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**ENVIRONMENT AGENCY  
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St Thomas



— Area Administrative Boundaries

— Regional Boundary

● Area Office

▲ Regional Headquarters



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