

# Solent Water Quality Conference 2010



## Defra's Outline Overview of the Revised Bathing Water Directive

Kate Hedges, Policy Advisor (Bathing and Shellfish Waters) Defra  
Email: [kate.hedges@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:kate.hedges@defra.gsi.gov.uk)

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### Revised Bathing Water Directive

The revised Bathing Water Directive (2006/7/EC) will introduce tighter water quality standards based on two parameters, intestinal enterococci and Escherichia coli, and will introduce a new bathing water classification system. The Directive takes over from the previous Directive (76/160/EEC) in stages from 2012 onwards.

### Implementation Timeline

The stages of implementation of the revised Directive will be:

2010 –

- The EC will announce symbols for water quality classification and advice against bathing
- Defra will issue guidance for bathing water controllers in England

2011 – The Environment Agency will complete bathing water profiles and will contact controllers to advise about information for signs.

May 2012 - signs will be in place at all bathing waters and the Environment Agency will begin monitoring water quality at bathing waters using the revised standards.

2015 – bathing water results will be reported using the new classifications.

2016 - EC symbols will be in use on signs.

### Classifications

From the end of the 2015 bathing season, bathing water quality will be classified as Excellent, Good, Sufficient or Poor. These classifications will be based on a 4 year data set. The Excellent classification is approximately twice as stringent as the current Guideline standard; Good is approximately equivalent to the current Guideline, and Sufficient is approximately twice as stringent as the current Mandatory standard. A Poor classification means that the bathing water has not complied with the Directive's standards, and advice against bathing must be put in place during the next bathing season. Compliance with the current Directive has improved since its introduction, particularly in relation to the higher Guideline standard (69.8% in 2009). The current standards will be used until 2014.

The new classifications are based on 4 years of monitoring data, to give a better overall picture of water quality. The Environment Agency has produced a prediction based on the last 4 years of water quality monitoring data (2006-2009) to assess how bathing waters would have been classified in 2009 if the new standards had already been in place. These assessed results do not take account of any improvements that may be made at bathing waters before the new classifications come into effect. Details can be found at:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/quality/water/waterquality/bathing/documents/bathingwaterqualitypredictions.pdf>.

Defra and the Environment Agency will be working between now and 2015 to explain changes to the standards and are happy to provide information or attend events to discuss the revised Directive. (Contact [bathingwater@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:bathingwater@defra.gsi.gov.uk)).

## Bathing Water Profiles

Each bathing water will be required to have a written profile, produced by the Environment Agency, describing its physical, geographical and hydrological characteristics and assessing sources of pollution in the catchment that might affect the bathing water and impair bathers' health. Profiles will be available on the Environment Agency website and will provide the basis for a brief description of the bathing water on information signs. They will be regularly reviewed, and updated when appropriate, and will function both as a management tool and as a source of information for the public. The Environment Agency is currently preparing profiles for all the bathing waters in England and Wales, and during 2011 will contact bathing water controllers to work with them on preparing text for the signs.

## New Rules for Signage

There will be a requirement for information about water quality and potential sources of pollution to be provided to the public, with effect from 2012. This is a new responsibility for bathing water controllers, i.e. local authorities and private owners or leaseholders at beaches and inland waters. The revised Directive has a strong emphasis on providing information about water quality and pollution to the public. Information about water quality and potential sources of pollution in the catchment must be displayed at all bathing waters from the beginning of the 2012 bathing season. The European Commission is developing symbols to show bathing water classifications and advice against bathing, where appropriate, which will be in use following the 2015 bathing season. Similar information will also be available online. Signage will be the responsibility of bathing water controllers and it is hoped that the provision of information will help to raise awareness that water quality is monitored at designated bathing waters and will enable people to make informed choices about where and when to bathe.

We are working towards implementing the requirement for signage and plan to issue guidance for controllers during May 2010. We have been assisted in this by the UK Bathing Water Signage Working Group, consisting of: the Environment Agency; the devolved UK administrations; several local authorities; LACORS; the Health Protection Agency; the RNLI; RoSPA; the National Trust and Visit England.

There are concerns among bathing water controllers and businesses in coastal towns about the impact of signs at beaches providing information about water quality and pollution. Market research commissioned in 2009 by the Environment Agency showed that the main priorities in choosing a beach to visit were the cleanliness and nature of the beach, rather than water quality. There was a general feeling that water quality has improved over the years, although people's opinion about water quality tended to be influenced by their perception of the resort. Most respondents said that they would feel confident about bathing in water classified as "sufficient", particularly those who had visited the resort intending to bathe. When asked, most said that they would like to have information about bathing water classifications and sources of pollution.

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