

21 December 2018

Information Letter 03/2018

To: Board Level and Day to Day contacts of Water and Sewerage Companies and Water Companies in England and Wales

Dear Sir/Madam

METALDEHYDE – Recent developments and actions required

1. Purpose

This letter is to inform all water companies of the outcome of a recent review of authorisations for the use of metaldehyde products.

It updates my letter of 6 March 2018 to those companies with catchment management Undertakings for metaldehyde. It sets out arrangements for the management and delivery of those Undertakings; and comments on some wider implications for arrangements for drinking water supplies.

2. Background

On 19 December 2018, the Environment Secretary announced a ban on the outdoor use of metaldehyde, to be introduced across Great Britain. A copy of the press release is attached as Annex a.

In brief, the key elements most relevant to drinking water quality matters are:

- The reauthorisation process has determined that, on the basis of the impact on small birds and mammals, only metaldehyde used in greenhouses will be permitted;
- There will be a transition period of 18 months to allow suppliers and pesticide users to use up their stocks of metaldehyde;
- This means that, by the spring of 2020, the risk of metaldehyde contaminating drinking water is likely to be significantly reduced. Therefore we will no longer need to consult on an additional targeted ban to further protect drinking water sources;
- We expect water companies to continue their important work investing in catchment activities during this transition period, and beyond, to maximise the prospect of full compliance with the drinking water standard for metaldehyde.

This letter will enable water companies to review and confirm the provisions they have made in business plans for activities to achieve and maintain compliance. This may be directly, through improvement programmes resulting from enforcement action by the Inspectorate, or indirectly, through schemes (mainly catchment management activities) agreed with the Environment Agency or Natural Resources Wales.

Additionally, companies may wish to review the provisions that they have made for mitigating metaldehyde contamination in relation to transfers, bulk supplies, and other arrangements for their contingency planning, and within their draft water resource management plans.

3. Arrangements for existing Undertakings for metaldehyde

As mentioned in my previous letter, we have reviewed the continuing fitness for purpose of the current Undertakings for metaldehyde following this re-authorisation.

These Undertakings are bespoke, some cover metaldehyde issues only, whereas others include other pesticides. They incorporate differing solutions; catchment management, treatment and operational measures; some relate to bulk supplies and transfers; and some companies have draft Undertakings in preparation following recent enforcement action.

The outcome of our review is that the existing catchment management Undertakings are no longer fit for purpose due to the change of circumstances described above, and need to be updated.

Consequently, we propose to write individually to the affected companies, early in the New Year, to initiate submission of revised Undertakings. We propose no changes to the guidance provided previously, i.e. the revised Undertakings may:

- extend completion in achieving compliance beyond the current end date of 2020, to no later than 2025.
- cover metaldehyde only; for Undertakings including other parameters (apart from total pesticides), revised Undertakings or completion reports for the other parameters will be requested;
- cover the same water supply zones as existing Undertakings. Any extension of the geographical area covered requires justification and individual discussion with the Inspectorate;
- include steps to manage metaldehyde contamination of raw water in conjunction with other stakeholders through the processes required to implement the reauthorisation;
- include an annual progress reporting step each January starting in January 2020;

It is our expectation that the revised Undertakings will focus primarily on catchment management and operational activities to achieve compliance and mitigate risk. We expect these measures to continue during and beyond the transition period, until evidence is available to close the Undertakings.

Our letters to individual companies in the New Year will address the evidence requirements for closure, and will provide a revised template for companies to use for submission of draft Undertakings.

I would like to take this opportunity to emphasise that our source to tap approach to risk mitigation is not altered by this decision about one substance. Water companies are expected to develop and maintain comprehensive catchment management activities to deal with the ongoing, challenges from climate change, land use and other causes of raw water deterioration.

4. Other consequences of these changes

The changes outlined above do not alter the current guidance provided by the Inspectorate to companies on matters relating to wholesomeness; acceptability to consumers; long term planning; contingency planning; and the risk of deterioration of supplies due to transfers and bulk supplies.

Copies of this letter are being sent to:

- Michael Roberts, Chief Executive, Water UK;
- Margaret Read, Water Services, Department of Environment and Rural Affairs
- Richard Coles, Jan Dixon, Kirstin Green; Water Quality, Department of Environment and Rural Affairs
- Eifiona Williams, Water Management Team, Welsh Government;
- Sue Petch, Drinking Water Quality Regulator for Scotland;
- Catriona Davis, David O'Neill, Drinking Water Inspectorate for Northern Ireland;
- Tony Smith and Chairs of the Regional Consumer Council for Water;
- Kevin Ridout, Paul Martin, Ofwat;
- Helen Wakeham, Deputy Director, Water Quality, Groundwater and Land Contamination, Environment Agency
- Geraint Weber; Water Strategy Advisor, Natural Resources Wales
- Grant Stark; Health and Safety Executive
- Benedict Duncan, Food Standards Agency;
- David Williams; Chemicals Pesticides and Hazardous, Department of Environment and Rural Affairs
- Stephen Robjohns and Ovnair Sepai at Public Health England.

This letter is being sent electronically to Board Level and day to day contacts. Hard copies are not being sent but the letter may be freely copied.

Any enquiries about the letter should be addressed directly to Caroline Knight caroline.Knight@defra.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely



Milo Purcell
Deputy Chief Inspector



PRE SS RELEASE: FOR IMMEDIATE RE LEASE 19 DECEMBER

Restrictions on the use of metaldehyde to protect wildlife

A ban on the outdoor use of metaldehyde, a pesticide used to control slugs in a range of crops and in gardens, is to be introduced across Great Britain from Spring 2020, the Environment Secretary announced today (19 December).

The decision to prohibit the use of metaldehyde, except in permanent greenhouses, follows advice from the UK Expert Committee on Pesticides (ECP) and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) that metaldehyde poses an unacceptable risk to birds and mammals.

Slugs can cause significant damage to plants and crops, particularly potatoes, cereals and oil seed rape. However, there are other ways to mitigate their impact through soil preparation. For example, sowing the seed deeper into the soil may prevent the slugs from reaching them. There are also alternative pesticides containing ferric phosphate which provide effective control of slugs and snails without carrying the same risks to wildlife.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

"I recognise that significant effort has been put into encouraging growers and gardeners to use this pesticide responsibly by the Metaldehyde Stewardship Group. However, the advice is clear that the risks to wildlife are simply too great – and we must all play our part in helping to protect the environment.

"I encourage companies and growers to look at the alternatives, such as ferric phosphate, which is authorised and does not carry similar risks."

The outdoor use of metaldehyde will be phased out over 18 months to give growers time to adjust to other methods of slug control. It will be legal to sell metaldehyde products for outdoor use for the next six months, with use of the products then allowed for a further 12 months.

The new restrictions on metaldehyde will also reduce the possibility of the pesticide contaminating drinking water sources. Although this was not a factor in the advice from ECP and HSE, the restrictions will help water companies continue to meet our robust drinking water standards.

ENDS

Notes to editors:

- For further information please contact Defra press office on 020 8225 7317 or out of hours on 0345 051 8486