

Bathing water

Busting common myths

We're helping to improve our bathing waters by reducing storm overflows, upgrading our network and tackling illegally connected private pipes. This year nine of our 87 bathing waters have improved, meaning 89% are classified as good or excellent.

What is a designated bathing water?


It's a body of water recognised by the Environment Agency as being popular for swimming or other water-based activities.



Myth

Bathing water quality is much worse than it used to be, it was better before the water industry was privatised. 


Fact

The quality of our bathing waters has drastically improved since the water industry was privatised in 1989. A total of **£10 billion** has been spent to increase the volume of wastewater that's fully treated, before being released back into the environment from around 50% pre-privatisation, to around 95% today. The quality of our bathing waters has improved from 28% meeting public health standards, to 89% now rated as 'good' or 'excellent'. 

Myth

The quality of bathing waters in the South East aren't good. 

Fact


We have **87 designated bathing waters in our region**, 77 are rated Good or Excellent by the Environment Agency. We're working with local authorities and partners to identify the issues and support improvement at the remaining bathing water spots. 




Myth

Sewage spills mean you shouldn't swim.


Fact

Storm overflows (emergency valves that release when the system becomes overloaded with rain or groundwater to stop homes and businesses from flooding) are just one of the many factors which affect bathing water quality. In fact, data shows that releases don't always have an impact on bathing areas. Other factors that affect water quality include run-off from farms, road drains, local wildlife, beach and water users and wastewater pipes being wrongly connected to a surface water drainage system. 

Myth

If it's smelly, floating in the water and looks like sewage, it's sewage. 

Fact

Warm weather and long days encourage algae growth known as 'algal blooms'. It often smells of rotting eggs or vegetables and has a brown, scum-like appearance, so it can easily be confused with sewage. 

Myth

Dirty looking water coming out of a pipe onto a beach or into a river is a sewage spill.



Fact

Outfalls on beaches and rivers aren't always wastewater pipes. Many are surface water drains that carry rainwater mixed with dirt and debris from roads and pavements. We're currently labelling our wastewater pipes to help the public know which pipes belong to us.



Myth

Southern Water doesn't invest enough in bathing water quality and stopping sewage spills.



Fact

We're spending **£1.5 billion** to cut storm overflow releases. We are prioritising the overflows set by our regulators – shellfish waters, environmentally sensitive sites and bathing waters.



Myth

Southern Water ignores 'Poor' rated areas.



Fact

We act immediately with investigations, increased monitoring and improvement plans. We work with councils, citizen scientists and the Environment Agency to identify what might be impacting the water quality. This can range from homes illegally connected to surface water drains instead of the wastewater system, leaky private cess pits and damage to our sewer pipes.



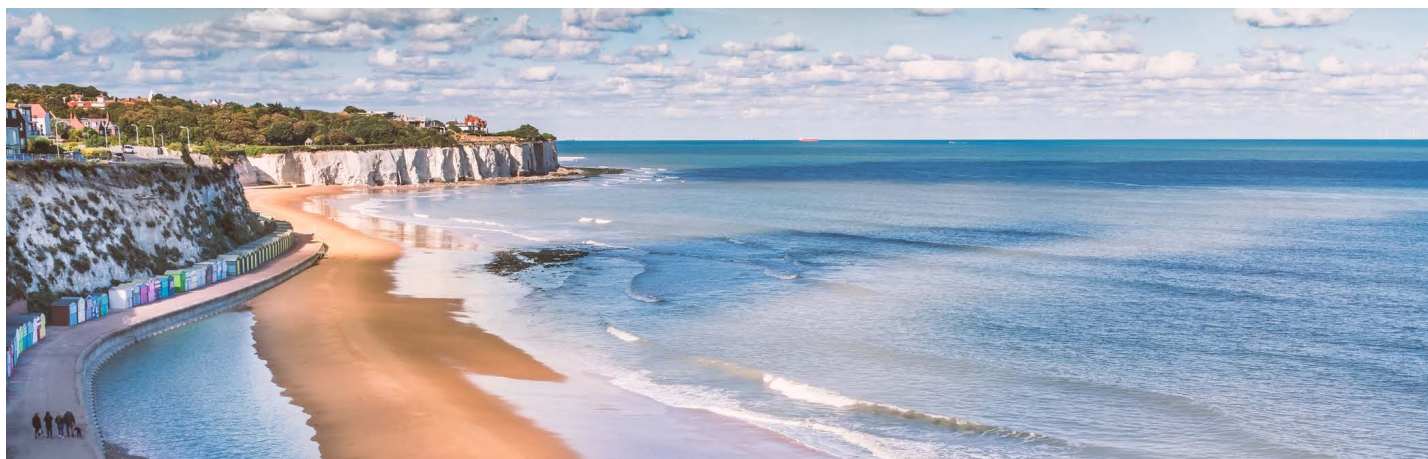
Myth

Clear water means safe water.



Fact

The sea isn't sterile. Harmful bacteria and pollutants can be invisible and can come from many sources, from litter and seabird or animal waste on the beach, to road and farm run-off, illegal connections of wastewater to surface sewers, and storm overflows.



Independent water quality information can be found on [Swimfo](#), and we report on all our storm overflow releases and whether they have impacted bathing waters on our monitoring service, [Rivers and Seas Watch](#).