

Bathing Water Designation: Guidance for Local Authorities

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Bathing Water Programme in Wales

This document is drafted for local authorities. If the local authority is also the landowner, the landowner guidance should also be referred to.

The Bathing Water Programme is designed to protect bathers' health against bacterial pollution and provide information to the public to enable them to make informed decisions about where and when they bathe.

Every year, the Welsh Government receives applications for popular bathing locations across Wales to be designated as bathing waters under the Bathing Water Regulations 2013 as amended by the Bathing Water Regulations 2025 (the Regulations). Applications can be submitted by individuals, groups, businesses, local authorities, or other third parties. The Regulations set criteria for the designation of bathing waters, which must be met for an application to be considered. These criteria ensure that both public health and environmental protections are appropriately balanced.

The key criteria for designation are:

1. The expectation of a "large" number of bathers. The Welsh Government definition of a 'large number of bathers' is set out in [bathing water application guidance](#). The Welsh Government considers 'large' to be a minimum of 100 bathers per day for coastal sites and 50 for inland sites (lakes, ponds, rivers and reservoirs). Bather numbers must be recorded by the applicant on at least 20 days over the course of the Welsh bathing season. Within this period, there must be at least 100 bathers recorded on a minimum of 5 days for coastal sites, and at least 50 bathers recorded on a minimum of 5 days for inland sites, during a 4-hour peak period.
2. Designations also consider whether the presence of a large number of bathers is likely to have a significant adverse impact on the effectiveness of any environmental protection measures in place at, or near, the surface water.
3. Consideration is given to whether there are significant risks to physical safety at the location, especially those risks that exceed the usual dangers associated with open water swimming. These risks may arise from specific features of the site.
4. Finally, if the site's water quality is likely to be classified as poor and improving it to a sufficient standard is either not feasible or would require a disproportionately high cost, this may affect the suitability of the site for designation.

Natural Resources Wales (NRW) monitor the water quality at designated bathing waters in Wales throughout the bathing season. Each bathing water is classified annually at the end of the bathing season based on their water quality as 'excellent', 'good,' 'sufficient', or 'poor'.

As set out within the Regulations, the Local Authority controls a bathing water if the relevant land relating to that bathing water is located within its area and is assigned several statutory duties related to its management, regardless of whether the land is privately owned.

However, this does not imply control over the land or site itself, which remains under private ownership and responsibility. This document provides guidance to Local Authorities on their statutory duties at designated bathing waters under their control.

Bathing water applications and designation

Applications – Support, Safety, and Water Quality

Anyone may apply to designate a bathing water. We encourage applicants to work collaboratively with the local authority when an application is being prepared.

When compiling an application, Welsh Government asks the applicant to engage with the local authority and confirm the following with the local authority by way of a letter:

- if the local authority is aware and approves of the intention to seek designation of the site as a bathing water, and (where available) for any supporting information they have on whether the site is used by a large number of bathers.
- Whether the local authority is aware if the site subject to advice against bathing, and that bathing at the site is permitted.
- whether any features of the site pose significant risks to the physical safety of bathers beyond the usual hazards associated with open-water swimming, and whether there are any recorded bather accidents or risk assessments that reference bathing. If such information exists, it should be shared with the applicant.
- Whether the environmental health team (or other relevant team) has any significant concerns regarding bathing water quality at the site. This should include any monitoring relevant to bathing waters at or near the site as well as any concerns regarding cyanobacteria (blue-green algae) or sickness reports.

Please retain any communications with an applicant regarding a potential bathing water application, as Welsh Government officials may need to confirm information included in an application.

Designation Process

The Welsh Government will also notify the Local Authority in writing when a bathing water application for a site located within their area has been received. This notification will also confirm whether any information submitted as part of the application – particularly references to engagement with the local authority – is accurate. A further request for the information listed above will be made, if the information isn't already available.

All applications will be assessed by the Welsh Government. If there appears to be a case for designation from the initial information provided the Welsh Government will run a public consultation, the results of which will be considered alongside all other evidence. The Local Authority may contribute to the consultation. Following the consultation, the Welsh Government will notify the Local Authority in writing of the final decision on whether the site will become designated as a bathing water. The decision will also be published on the Welsh Government's website.

Local Authority duties at designated bathing waters

Bathing Water Signage

A Local Authority that controls a bathing water must, in accordance with Regulation 9, ensure that information about the bathing water is actively disseminated and made available to the public during the bathing season. This should be in the form of a sign located in an easily accessible place in the vicinity of the bathing water. An example of a bathing water sign is at [Annex 1](#).

The sign must include the following information:

1. A description of the bathing water based on NRW's bathing water profile, which can be found [here](#)
2. The current bathing water classification symbol provided by NRW (Figure 1). If a site is newly designated, NRW will provide a bathing water classification after the first bathing season has concluded. The bathing water classification symbol will need to be added to the sign before the commencement of the following bathing season
3. Any advice against bathing due to poor water quality which has been issued, represented by the no bathing symbol (Figure 2)
4. Information regarding any local Pollution Risk Forecasting. Not all beaches have pollution risk forecasting, this will be detailed on NRW's bathing water profile.
5. A reference to more detailed information published by NRW, available in the bathing water profile.

Figure 1.

Symbols for informing on bathing water classification

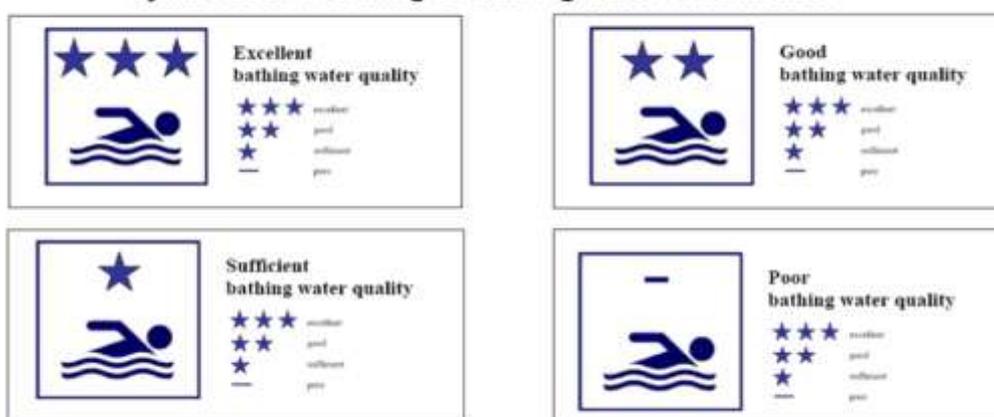


Figure 2.

Symbols for informing advice against bathing



The above outlines the minimum signage requirements as specified by the regulations. The Welsh Government acknowledges that all bathing waters are unique and encourages Local Authorities to tailor their signs to suit their specific sites, including any relevant local information, while still meeting the minimum signage requirements set out in the regulations.

The Welsh Government is committed to promoting the Welsh language and ensuring equal treatment for both Welsh and English in public communications. Under the [Welsh Language \(Wales\) Measure 2011](#) and the [Welsh Language Standards](#), public bodies, including local authorities, are legally required to provide bilingual signage. This means that all public information, including bathing water signs, should be available in both Welsh and English. While the Bathing Water Regulations 2013 as amended by the Bathing Water Regulations 2025 (the Regulations) do not explicitly mandate bilingual signs, compliance with Welsh language legislation is essential to ensure inclusivity and accessibility for all members of the community.

If the Local Authority requires support to fund a sign for a bathing water, this can be accessed via Welsh Government's Access Improvement Grant. This should be available to the Local Authority's Public Rights of Way department.

Pollution Incidents

A Local Authority also has duties when pollution incidents occur. Pollution incidents as set out in the Regulations include:

- Contamination by Intestinal enterococci or E.coli
- Cyanobacteria, macro algae or marine phytoplankton proliferation
- the presence of waste (including tarry residues, glass, plastic or rubber)
- Any other incident, other than an incident of [short-term pollution](#), that the Local Authority, NRW or local sewage undertaker considers may pose a risk to bathing water quality and bathers' health.

Pollution incidents may be identified by either NRW, sewerage undertaker, landowner or the Local Authority. In the event the Local Authority becomes aware of a pollution incident, it must promptly, or in the case of a cyanobacteria, immediately:

1. Notify NRW if necessary
2. Notify the local sewerage undertaker if necessary
3. Ensure that appropriate information is disseminated and promptly made available to the public in an easily accessible place in the vicinity of the bathing water
4. Take any other management measures as it considers appropriate to prevent exposing bathers to identified or presumed health risks
5. If applicable, remove the waste.

Short-term pollution events (Pollution risk forecasting)

At some designated bathing waters, with agreement from the Local Authority, computer models may be produced between NRW and the Local Authority to forecast short term pollution. In these circumstances, if poor water quality is forecast, the Local Authority in accordance with the forecast must immediately inform the public. **This should be in the form of a sign located in an easily accessible place in the vicinity of the bathing water.** NRW will also publish this information on the online bathing water profile.

The Local Authority must ensure that the sign is updated to include the following information:

1. Advice against bathing on days when short-term pollution is predicted or currently present
2. The total number of days where advice against bathing due to short-term pollution was issued at the bathing site during the last annual bathing season.

To be classified as a short-term pollution event, NRW may (at their discretion) also take a confirmation sample to show that the pollution lasted less than 72 hours. This will allow NRW to discount a scheduled bathing water sample, should one be taken, from the dataset to ensure that the annual bathing water classification is representative of normal conditions. If the Local Authority fail to inform the public by putting up signage at the bathing water, NRW will be unable to discount samples taken on that day. This may lead to the site's end of year classification changing due to these samples being included.

Abnormal situations

An Abnormal Situation refers to an event or combination of events impacting bathing water quality that NRW would not expect to occur, on average, more than once every four years. This could be due to factors like pollution or other environmental issues. Once NRW has declared an Abnormal Situation at a bathing water, it will remain in place until the event or combination of events no longer affects bathing water quality.

NRW will notify the Local Authority when an Abnormal Situation is declared. The Local Authority must promptly post warning signs in an easily accessible place in the vicinity of the bathing water to inform the public about potential risks, expected duration and measures that are being taken to address the issue.

It is important that the Local Authority works closely with NRW during an Abnormal Situation to identify any changes in conditions and communicate with any stakeholders.

NRW may suspend planned bathing water monitoring or disregard samples taken during the duration of the abnormal situation.

Additional management measures at “poor” bathing waters

At the end of each bathing water season, NRW classifies each bathing water based on their water quality. Bathing waters that fail to achieve bathing water standards are assessed as being 'poor'.

NRW will notify the Local Authority following the end of the bathing season if a bathing water is classified as poor. The Local Authority must:

1. Issue advice against bathing at the bathing water
2. Take appropriate measures to prevent bathers exposure to pollution at the bathing water e.g. temporal and/or special restrictions

If NRW classifies a bathing water as poor for 5 consecutive years, or where NRW has advised the Minister that it would be infeasible or disproportionately expensive to reach a 'sufficient' classification, NRW may issue permanent advice against bathing.

Following the Bathing Water (Amendment) (England and Wales) Regulations 2025 instead of automatically de-designating a bathing water after five consecutive years of being classified as 'poor,' NRW as the appropriate authority will now assess its potential for improvement. Based on this assessment, NRW will then advise the Minister on whether allowing more time could enable the water to achieve a 'sufficient' classification, rather than removing its designation. As part of this advice, NRW will contact the Local Authority to contribute to the feasibility assessment.

Where there is permanent advice against bathing, NRW will notify the Local Authority that there is permanent advice against bathing and that it is no longer a designated bathing water. When a Local Authority receives this advice, it must ensure that the following information is actively disseminated and promptly made available to the public near the former bathing water:

1. There is permanent advice against bathing
2. The site is no longer a bathing water
3. The reasons for declassification.

Enforcement

Under the Regulations, the Welsh Ministers can bring enforcement action if a Local Authority fails to fulfil its duties as outlined in the regulations, particularly under Regulation 16 which grants Ministers the authority to issue notices ensuring compliance. Appropriate and accurate signage at bathing waters is a statutory duty that Local Authorities must comply with, as is ensuring that the signs are updated when necessary (in particular under pollution risk forecasting).

Under the Regulations, the Welsh Ministers are provided with powers to take enforcement action if a person who controls a bathing water impedes a local authority in the carrying out of its obligations following the designation of a bathing water. Local Authorities are advised to inform NRW if they encounter any such obstruction in performing their duties.

Local Authority liability at bathing waters

The liability that landowners are subject to is primarily covered by two Acts of Parliament. The Occupiers Liability Act 1957 states that Local Authority must take reasonable care to ensure that visitors invited or permitted to use the land will be reasonably safe doing whatever they are invited or permitted to do on their land. The Occupiers Liability Act 1984 extends the duty of care to those not invited, including trespassers.

If Local Authorities have concerns, they may wish to carry out a formal risk assessment by an accredited body at their own expense.

The Bathing Water Regulations allow for monitoring and managing the water quality at bathing locations where there are a large number of bathers to ensure they meet certain standards for public health. The Regulations do not shift, modify or transfer any pre-existing liabilities under the 1957 or 1984 Acts.

Should a Local Authority be unclear of their legal responsibilities for specific sites, it is advisable to seek support from a legal professional.

Further information

For more information about a particular bathing water, please visit [Find a Bathing Water](#). This includes most recent test results and other information which is updated annually. This link will also highlight if a bathing water is using pollution risk forecasts to predict short-term pollution events and where to find out further information.

For further assistance, please contact the following:

- Welsh Government at water@gov.wales
- Natural Resources Wales at: waterqualitypolicyteam@naturalresourceswales.gov.uk

Annex 1

Below is an example of a bathing water sign that meets the minimum information requirements. Local Authorities are encouraged to customise their signs to better suit their specific sites and to include any relevant local information. Pollution risk forecast information is only required at beaches with pollution risk forecasts.

NAMED BATHING WATER SITE

A designated bathing water where water quality is monitored from May to September by Natural Resources Wales.

① Water quality at NAMED BATHING WATER SITE

The bathing water is located in a long curved north facing bay. The beach is a gently sloping sandy beach as is backed by boulder clay cliffs. The beach is backed by the town, and then agricultural land. The cliffs are part of the SSSI and also the Special Area of Conservation. The water quality sample point lies opposite the end of the road down onto the beach.

④ Pollution risk forecasts

This bathing water is subject to short term pollution procedures. Natural Resources Wales makes a daily pollution risk forecast based on the effects of rain, wind and seasonality. These factors affect the levels of bacteria that get washed into the sea from livestock, sewage and urban drainage via rivers and streams and how they disperse. When short term pollution is likely a pollution risk warning is issued, and a warning is displayed at this bathing water and online. After a pollution risk warning, levels of bacteria usually return to normal after a day or so, but it's possible to have several warning days in a row. In 2023 8 pollution risk warnings were issued at this bathing water.

② Latest Annual Classification: 2024



Good
bathing water quality



⑤ For more information

The full details for this bathing water, its catchment, information on all potential pollution sources and how they are managed can be viewed on the Natural resources Wales website: <https://environment.data.gov.uk/wales/bathing-waters/profiles/>



③ when appropriate any advice against bathing due to poor water quality

SAFLE DŴR YMDROCHI A ENWIR

Dŵr ymdrochi dynodedig lle mae Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru'n monitro ansawdd y dŵr o fis Mai i fis Medi.

① Ansawdd dŵr ar SAFLE DŴR YMDROCHI A ENWIR

Mae'r dŵr ymdrochi wedi'i leoli mewn bae crwm hir sy'n wynebu'r gogledd. Mae'r traeth yn draeth tywodlyd ar oleddf ysgafn gyda chlogwyni o glogfeini clai yn gefn iddo. Y tu ôl i'r traeth y mae'r dref, ac yna dir amaethyddol. Mae'r clogwyni yn rhan o'r SoDdGA a hefyd yn Ardal Cadwraeth Arbennig. Saif y pwynt samplu ansawdd dŵr gyferbyn â phen y ffordd sy'n mynd i lawr i'r traeth.

④ Rhagolygon risg o lygredd

Mae'r dŵr ymdrochi hwn yn dod o dan y drefn llygredd tymor byr. Mae Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru yn cynnal rhagolwg dyddiol o'r risg o lygredd, yn seiliedig ar effeithiau glaw, gwynt a thymor. Mae'r ffactorau hyn yn effeithio ar lefelau bacteria o dda byw, carthion a draenio trefol sy'n cael eu golchi i'r môr trwy afonydd a nentydd ac ar sut maent yn gwasgaru. Pan fydd achos o lygru tymor byr yn debygol, cyhoeddir rhybudd risg o lygru, a dangosir rhybudd yn y dŵr ymdrochi hwn ac ar-lein. Ar ôl rhybudd risg o lygru, mae lefelau bacteria fel arfer yn dychwelyd i lefelau normal ar ôl diwrnod neu ddau, ond mae'n bosibl y gall rhybudd bara sawl diwrnod. Yn 2023 cyhoeddwyd 8 rhybudd risg o llygru yn y dŵr ymdrochi hwn.

② Dosbarth Ansawdd Blynyddol Diweddaraf:



Da
Ansawdd dŵr ymdrochi



I GAEL RHAGOR O WYBODAETH:

Gellir gweld manylion llawn y dŵr ymdrochi hwn, ei ddalgyrch, gwybodaeth am yr holl ffynonellau llygredd posibl a sut y maent yn cael eu rheoli ar wefan Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru:

<https://environment.data.gov.uk/wales/bathing-waters/profiles/>



③ pan fo'n briodol, unrhyw gyngor yn erbyn ymdrochi oherwydd ansawdd dŵr gwael