

Replies to:
Cllr K D Evans
Chairman, Hamble River Harbour Board
Hampshire County Council
The Castle
Winchester
Hampshire
SO23 8UJ

Chief Executive
Highways Agency
5th Floor
123 Buckingham Palace Road
London
SW1W 9HA

3 February 2010

Dear

I am writing in my capacity as Chairman of the River Hamble Harbour Board to draw your attention to a matter which is of considerable concern to me and my fellow Harbour Board members.

The River Hamble is spanned by the M27 motorway and, at present, much of the run-off from the surface of the motorway bridge and its approaches drains directly into the River Hamble, without the benefit of interceptors.

On 10 November 2009, there was a significant spill of diesel fuel on the M27. The lorry responsible for the incident came to a halt on the bridge over the River Hamble. By sheer good fortune, it seems that none of the fuel found its way into the River and a significant environmental incident was narrowly avoided. Harbour Authority personnel attended the scene and spoke to some of the emergency services personnel, none of whom appeared to be aware of the dangers which a fuel spill presents to the River Hamble, or of the agreed procedures to deal it. I am also very concerned about a number of aspects regarding this incident:

1. The failure to fit interceptors to the bridge, despite numerous requests from the Harbour Authority over several years, has meant that the sensitive environment of the River Hamble remains extremely vulnerable to incidents like this.
2. The Harbour Authority was not informed of the incident by the emergency services or Highways Agency. We found out about it because a colleague heard of it on his car radio and phoned it in. If fuel had been pouring into the River, this failure would have cost valuable time in responding to the incident.

3. The Environment Agency had not been informed about the incident until contacted by the Harbour Authority.

4. None of the emergency personnel appeared to be aware of the potential risk to the environment of the River and none knew where to find equipment to block the drains from the bridge.

These concerns were raised in writing with the Highways Agency on the day after the event and again on 16 December 2009 and 4 January 2010. There was no reply or acknowledgement received on any of these occasions.

Two further road traffic accidents have occurred on or close to the bridge since 10 November. These were on 15th and 18th January 2010 – fortunately neither resulted in pollution entering the Hamble. Once again, the case for a thorough review of the incident response arrangements for this section of motorway, including the fitting of interceptors to the Hamble bridge, has been made, probably more powerfully than before. Urgent action is required now, before it is too late.

Yours sincerely

Councillor Keith Evans
Chairman, River Hamble Harbour Board

Copy to:

Minister of State for Transport

Great Minster House
76 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DR

Our ref: TO 0502-30
Your ref:

Cllr. K D Evans
Chairman
Hamble River Harbour Board
Hampshire County Council
The Castle
Winchester
Hampshire
SO23 8UJ

Federated House
London Road
Dorking RH4 1SZ

Direct Line:

19 February 2010

Dear Councillor Evans

M27 MOTORWAY BRIDGE - RIVER HAMBLE

Thank you for your letter dated 3 February 2010 regarding your concerns about the absence of interceptors on the M27 Motorway Bridge over the River Hamble. I have been asked to reply.

I fully appreciate your concerns about the potential pollution threat to the river and can assure you that we are committed to identifying and implementing practical steps to manage the drainage of the road network, by minimising the impact of traffic and maintenance operations on watercourses, groundwater and flooding. With regards to the four aspects raised in your letter, concerning the incident on 10 November 2009 please find below the following details.

1. The River Hamble Bridge was constructed and commissioned in 1973. At this time it was not a design requirement for interceptors to be fitted to any bridge drainage system. In October 2006 a study was undertaken by the Highways Agency which identified 271 outfalls on the national network where additional treatment or spillage containment measures may be required. These were ranked into five priority categories A-E and required further local investigation to confirm the need for and appropriate type of improvements (not just fitting interceptors). The River Hamble was not identified during this process, because the actual chance of any hazardous spillage occurring has been calculated at this location as less than one instance in every 7000 years.
2. The incident occurred at 15.17. Our Regional Control Centre (RCC) attempted to make contact with the Harbour Master at 17:56 on 07718 146380 and 07718146381 but was unsuccessful. This was recorded on the RCC incident log 1097. Apparently these two telephone numbers are for the Patrol Officers, and they only operate during daylight hours; two new telephone numbers for 24 hour coverage will be provided by the acting deputy harbour master.

3. The Environment Agency (EA) was contacted by our local Network Control Centre (NCC) at 19:23 and arrived at the incident at 20:19. The EA carried out an assessment on environmental impact, and were satisfied that the appropriate action had been taken.

4. The Police led this incident and were assisted by our Incident Support Unit (ISU). ISU personnel are trained in pollution / spillage prevention and containment, and carry spill kits on board their vehicles. In addition to the ISU spill kits, 4 bins containing spill kits are strategically placed at each of the four corners of the bridge. In an event of a spillage, a pollution procedure is adhered to that involves close liaison with the ISU crews, the emergency services and the EA who advise where necessary.

Hampshire Police reported the incident to our NCC at 15:17 and to our RCC, at 15:21. Our ISU was deployed to attend the scene at 15:19. On route to the incident the crew collected an additional 20-30 bags of liquid absorption materials from our Ower depot. Once at the incident, they immediately dealt with the spillage. Oil bungs, deployed from the four incident bins on site, were installed into the gullies together with sand bags to prevent any spillage entering the gullies, which remained clear.

I assure you that the Highways Agency recognises the importance of the River Hamble and surrounding area and keeps the site under review. We have a Memorandum of Understanding with the Environment Agency and through this gain advice on procedures, techniques and kit to be used. In conjunction with the Emergency Services we undertake practice exercises in spillage containment to facilitate quick and effective action in the event of an incident.

I hope the above fully addresses your concerns however should you require any further information, can be contacted on
telephone number or by e-mail

Yours sincerely

Network Delivery and Development South East Area 3
Email.