

Nurdles in Chessel Bay LNR

Letter to Environment Agency March 2019 and their Response

“Dear Environment Agency

I contacted you in 2012, regarding the thousands of nurdles found along the shoreline in Chessel Bay Local Nature Reserve on the river Itchen. I was assured by you that the Environment Agency were aware of the problem and was monitoring the situation along the river Itchen and with the local plastics industry.

Although Friends of Chessel Bay and the local City Council have clean-ups twice a year, it is only practical for volunteers to remove fairly substantial objects from the site. (Our last haul of rubbish was over a tonne - most of this plastic!) Very large quantities of nurdles remain integrated into the substrate and have done so for many years. They, as well as any new plastic pellets which arrive on the tide, are all but impossible to remove by volunteer effort.

Recent research confirms that nurdles are not only unsightly but adsorb toxins and provide an environment for the formation of biofilm by opportunistic microbial colonisers. The recent publication by the University of Stirling (see link below) "Colonisation of plastic pellets (nurdles) by E. coli at public bathing beaches" Marine Pollution Bulletin 139 (2019) 376-380 makes very uneasy reading indeed.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0025326X19300116>

Please can you tell me what steps the Environment Agency will be taking to reduce and control the ongoing problem of plastic pellets locally? This is obviously a problem that won't easily go away.

Thank you.

Best Wishes Rose Nicole local community contact for Friends of Chessel Bay”

Dear Rose,

My sincere apologies for not responding to your email sooner. It was passed to me by my colleague .

There are several companies on the River Itchen that use these nurdles to manufacture plastic goods. We have undertaken pollution prevention visits in order to improve operations and prevent release of plastics to the environment. There is a history of incident reports in relation to plastic production companies which use nurdles in the area surrounding the River Itchen. Improvements have been made to contain nurdles over recent years but due to their small size and the volume used spillages are common and clean up challenging. We have worked with the sites to encourage installation of drainage grates, border walls and spill kits to improve clean up procedures. We have worked with Southern Water as often these nurdles collect in surface water drains until a large rain event flushes them into the river.

Our most recent visit to one of these companies was in August 2018. Officers confirmed that all previously implemented pollution prevention measures were still in place, actions requested following our previous visit in August 2017 had been actioned and the company were receptive to our additional suggestions for improvement.

We remain in contact with these companies and have requested notification in the event of significant nurdle spillages. We have contacted our national plastic pollution team for advice. We will continue to investigate reports and take action where appropriate.

I would ask that you and your colleagues contact the Environment Agency on our National Incident number 0800 807060 to report any incidences of spills of nurdles to the environment.

Kind Regards

Environment Agency. April 2019"