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Foot and Mouth disease outbreak

Environmental impacts update

A year on from our interim assessment report (**Environmental impacts report**) the Agency has reviewed the latest information on the environmental impacts of the foot and mouth outbreak. The news is good, although monitoring of disposal sites continues.

Our initial conclusion holds, that most effects from the disposal of over 6,250,000 animals were short-term and local:

- The numbers of odour complaints related to carcass disposal at some landfill sites have returned to normal. There have not been any other local environmental impacts at landfill sites. The increase in landfill effluent loads in some cases required upgraded treatment systems; at Distington landfill in Cumbria leachate has been tankered away for disposal.
- Some minor breaches of discharge consents by sewage treatment works were attributed to disruption from the outbreak. Delays to improvements at four sewage works were reported by South West Water.
- There have been no significant surface water pollution incidents related to foot and mouth activities since October 2001. Local pollution of small streams at one or two disposal sites has been stopped by remedial action. No river pollution from disposal sites has been found by routine monitoring (General Quality Assessment survey).
- Watercourses affected by disinfectant runoff recovered within a few months, according to those sites where biological surveys could be carried out. In some areas, such as Devon and Cornwall, no impacts on watercourses were found.
- At some burial sites, including six in Cumbria, unsuitable conditions, leaks or surface ponding of leachate or rainwater have required remedial action or monitoring.
- Groundwater and surface water monitoring at the four main mass burial sites shows no significant pollution to date. A few minor incidents have been quickly dealt with.
- Monitoring of groundwater at 123 sites near carcass, ash and disinfectant disposal sites has shown no contamination in most cases. At a small number of sites minor contamination may be related to foot and mouth disposal activities or other sources. Further investigation and monitoring are being carried out.

Although there have been few serious environmental impacts, there are significant financial and environmental costs of continuing to manage the disposal sites. These include the removal of leachate from some landfills and mass disposal sites, requiring road journeys by heavy tankers to distant waste water treatment works.

Further investigations should reveal any lasting risks or impacts. This includes a review of all groundwater authorisations for carcass and ash burial sites, and a risk assessment of burial sites of non-carcass material from cleansing and disinfection operations. Any problem sites will be monitored and the necessary remedial action taken.