

Firm in most PFAS-polluted town 'ignored advice' on forever chemical pollution, new document reveals

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EXCLUSIVE: The Environment Agency is investigating a firefighting foam manufacturer in the UK's most known PFAS-polluted town as a new document reveals it 'ignored advice and recommendations from its consultants that PFAS may be leaving the site'.



Angus Fire factory. Source - Rob Whitrow



In May last year, an ENDS Report [investigation](#) revealed that testing in 2008 of the groundwater on the Angus Fire site in Bentham, North Yorkshire, contained 1,199,000 ng/l of PFAS. A reading which experts said is the highest known concentration of PFAS ever recorded in the UK.

The testing took place near the firm's wastewater lagoons, which have historically contained contaminated run-off created during the testing of PFAS firefighting foams. The firm stopped sending contaminated water to these lagoons in 2020 and while open until last year, the lagoons are now covered.

In a statement in response to ENDS' initial investigation, Angus Fire said that the lagoons had been managed to "ensure no off-site release of PFAS".

Experts however cast doubt on this, with Dr Patrick Byrne, reader in hydrology and environmental pollution at Liverpool John Moores University, stating at the time that the data shows there is "clearly a pathway from the lagoons to the groundwater".

On the back of ENDS' initial investigation, [Bentham Town Council](#) asked Angus Fire to conduct further testing of various off-site locations. This testing [revealed](#) that soil in communal gardens owned by Angus Fire and made available for residents in Bentham to use is contaminated with elevated levels of PFAS. Some of this land is used for growing food.

Residents of homes near those gardens were advised that "exposure to PFAS could be mitigated (in part)



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by removing shoes before entering the home, routine cleaning of residences to remove dust, and peeling or thoroughly washing homegrown produce.”

Now, a document obtained by ENDS under freedom of information rules and shared exclusively with Channel 4 News has revealed that the Environment Agency is considering “potential action against the company”.

Watch the full Channel 4 video [here](#).



In minutes from a regulatory stakeholder meeting about PFAS in Bentham on 4 July 2024, it is stated that “information and reports obtained by the [Environment Agency] from Angus suggests that they have been aware of issues at the site for some time, they appear to have ignored advice and recommendations from their consultants that PFAS may be leaving the site through shallow groundwaters and direct discharges”.

The regulators present at the meeting were the Environment Agency, the UK Health Security Agency, the Food Standards Agency, North Yorkshire Council and the Drinking Water Inspectorate.

A spokesperson for Angus Fire said: “Angus Fire has not ignored advice and guidance from the independent consultants. On the contrary, we have followed their advice, and commissioned them to increase and widen their testing. That work is ongoing. Furthermore, we have consistently kept the Environment Agency fully updated about all of this work, as well as the local community’s elected representatives. We are in regular contact with the Environment Agency.”

An Environment Agency spokesperson said: “We are working with North Yorkshire Council to investigate historic PFAS contamination from the Angus Fire site. Our primary focus is to assess the risk to the environment and provide support to our partners on any risks to residents.”

The regulator has also told ENDS that it is reviewing Angus Fire’s environmental permit in relation to PFAS. In August the Environment Agency [handed](#) Angus Fire two regulation 61 notices requiring the firm to measure and disclose information on PFAS discharges from its site.

Two law firms have been [instructed](#) by residents in Bentham to investigate potential claims against Angus Fire. Both claims are touted to be the first ever PFAS-related legal case in the UK.

Commenting on the latest revelations, Emily Nicholson, partner at Mischo de Reya, said: “It is disappointing but perhaps not surprising that it appears that Angus has known about issues on site and PFAS pollution but has historically failed to do anything about it.

“Angus has previously stated that it is committed to protecting the health and safety of its employees, neighbours and the environment but it seems clear from what the Environment Agency has discovered that its actions do not align with its words. The Bentham community deserves better than this. Now is the time for Angus to conduct comprehensive testing, explain to the community what has gone on and commit to a full remediation plan.”

Charlotte Armstrong, senior associate solicitor at Leigh Day, said: “We are pleased that the EA finally appear to be taking action in relation to PFAS pollution in Bentham. However, the EA has noted significant permit breaches at Angus Fire over the years, including in March 2022 when it found evidence of unpermitted discharges of PFAS via liquids escaping from one of the wastewater lagoons. As such, it is unclear why the EA has taken so long to take decisive action. It is paramount that UK regulatory agencies, such as the EA, are proactive and attendant to the risks of PFAS in our environments to ensure that the “polluter pays” principle is put into practice”.

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