

Dear Sir/Madam

Protecting groundwater when developing or expanding cemeteries during the coronavirus pandemic

The Environment Agency's key priorities during the coronavirus pandemic are to protect the health, safety and well-being of our own staff, the public and the businesses and partners we work with; to prevent loss of life and serious harm to the environment; and to keep our critical operations running.

We are doing this by following the Government guidelines on reducing the risk of coronavirus; by seeking to act quickly, decisively and proportionately; and by responding flexibly as the situation develops.

One such way in which we are responding flexibly is to adapt our approach to the regulation of cemeteries and burials. We are all aware that there has been, very sadly, a significant increase in the numbers of deaths during this pandemic. We are also aware that large numbers of burials in a short time may have the potential to cause impacts on the environment. We are keen to work with our partners to ensure that burials can take place with minimal impact to the environment whilst maintaining dignity to all those involved. We have, therefore, developed new temporary guidance for local authorities and other cemetery operators on how to protect groundwater when expanding or developing cemeteries and burial grounds during the coronavirus pandemic. This is available on GOV.UK here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protecting-groundwater-when-developing-or-expanding-cemeteries-during-coronavirus>.

We will be supporting local authorities and other operators by offering to carry out groundwater risk assessments to help in their decision making, and will offer advice and guidance based on these risk assessments to protect the environment.

We will not require environmental permits for proposed cemetery developments during the coronavirus pandemic. Once the pandemic has ceased, we will require permits for cemeteries that represent a high risk to the environment or require active mitigation measures or burial controls to protect groundwater. This is in line with our previously communicated plans.

You can contact our National Customer Contact Centre on 03708 506 506 or enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk

Yours sincerely,



COVID-19 Flood and Environment Duty Manager

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gov.uk/environment-agency