



1.0 | Purpose

This leaflet sets out Environment Agency policy on culverts. This approach is recommended for other drainage authorities in England and Wales, and it is intended to act as a, guidance to developers and landowners

2.0 | Introduction

Watercourses fulfil many roles in today's environment.

They provide drainage for developed and agricultural land and are vital water resources, while some also have important recreational value.

They are important features of the landscape and provide habitats for a wide variety of wildlife. It is therefore important that watercourses and their associated habitats are protected and enhanced for the benefit of present and future generations.

The Agency considers it beneficial for watercourse to remain open wherever possible for both flood defence and environmental purposes. Culverting can exacerbate the risk of flooding and increase the maintenance requirements for a watercourse. It also destroys wildlife habitats, damages a natural amenity and interrupts the continuity of the linear habitat of a watercourse.

Nevertheless, the Agency recognises that watercourses over which drainage authorities exercise their regulatory powers pass through a wide range of land use types, from rural to industrial landscapes. Consequently, this policy accepts that in certain situations the use of culverts may be unavoidable.

Conserving open watercourses is one of the Agency's major aims and, where possible, the Agency will encourage and promote the removal of culverts in order to restore a more natural river environment.

3.0 | Agency Policy

The Agency is in general opposed to the culverting of watercourses because of the adverse ecological, flood defence and other effects that are likely to arise.

The Agency will therefore only approve an application to culvert a watercourse if there is no reasonably practicable alternative or if the detrimental effects of culverting would be so minor that they would not justify a more costly alternative. In all cases where it is inappropriate to do so adequate mitigation must be provided for damage caused.

Wherever practical the Agency will seek to have culverted watercourses restored to open channels.

4.0 | Reasons for the Policy

The Environment Act 1995 places both general and specific duties on the Agency relating to environmental, recreational and nature conservation matters. The Agency must be mindful of these duties in discharging all its functions, including those relating to flood defence and land drainage. Consequently, the Agency is in general opposed to the culverting of watercourses because of the detrimental effects that are likely to arise. Such effects may be:

- loss of and adverse effects on environmental features and wildlife habitat;
- increased likelihood of flooding due to blockage;
- increased impact of flooding;
- loss of floodwater storage;
- increased difficulties in providing for drainage connections;
- difficulties in the repair, maintenance and replacement of culverts;
- increased health and safety hazards;
- reduced groundwater recharge;
- increased difficulty in detecting the origins of pollution and in monitoring water quality.

5.0 | Exceptions

It is recognised that there are situations where culverting may in practice be unavoidable, such as short lengths for access purposes or where highways cross watercourses. In such cases alternatives such as open span bridges or diversion of the watercourse must have been considered, the length of the culvert restricted to the minimum necessary to meet the applicant's objective and, where appropriate, mitigating environmental enhancements included in the proposal.

6.0 | Legal Requirements

Any culverting of a watercourse, or the alteration of an existing culvert, requires land drainage consent. On main rivers the prior written consent of the Agency is required under Section 109 of the Water Resources Act 1991. On all other watercourses, except within the district of an internal drainage board (IDB), the Agency's consent is required under Section 23 of the Land Drainage Act 1991. In an IDB district the consent of the IDB is required, again under the Land Drainage Act 1991. Highways authorities are required under Section 339 of the highways Act 1980 to seek the consent of the drainage authority before carrying out any works affecting a watercourse.

7.0 | Further Guidance

Further information is available in the document **Environment Agency Policy Regarding Culverts - Explanation of Policy**, published by the Agency and available from all Agency offices.

MANAGEMENT AND CONTACTS:

The Environment Agency delivers a service to its customers, with the emphasis on authority and accountability at the most local level possible. It aims to be cost-effective and efficient and to offer the best service and value for money.

Head Office is responsible for overall policy and relationships with national bodies including Government.

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For general enquiries please call your local Environment Agency office. If you are unsure who to contact, or which is your local office, please call our general enquiry line.

**ENVIRONMENT AGENCY
GENERAL ENQUIRY LINE
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The 24-hour emergency hotline number for reporting all environmental incidents relating to air, and and water.

**ENVIRONMENT AGENCY
EMERGENCY HOTLINE
0800 80 70 60**



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