

Nature 2030: Our Vision for tackling Chemical pollution

20 September 2023

Wildlife and Countryside Link's 'manifestos' are policy briefings which provide detail about how the five policy asks made by the Nature 2030 campaign could be applied to benefit different aspects of nature. This manifesto covers chemicals.

Introduction

Chemicals are used widely in our daily lives - from the food we eat, to consumer goods such as cleaning products, furniture and electronics, to the development and consumption of pharmaceuticals.

Many of these chemicals are known to be harmful to nature and people and pollution has already exceeded safe limits for our planet.¹ The UN Environment Programme describes pollution from chemicals and waste, as one of the top five drivers of nature loss,² highlighting the especially devastating direct effects on freshwater and marine species.

The marked growth in hazardous chemical production means they are now found everywhere: pesticides are found in food and drinking water,³ cocktails of forever chemicals contaminate soils, groundwater and rivers,⁴ flame retardants coat electronics, furniture and clothing,⁶ and harmful chemicals accrue inside wildlife and humans.⁷ Numerous chemicals are not captured by wastewater treatment, and enter rivers through 'clean water' or the breakdown of parent chemicals into more toxic substances.⁹ Chemical production is also a major contributor to carbon emissions, meaning it is interlinked with the climate crisis.¹⁰ The

¹ [Outside the Safe Operating Space of the Planetary Boundary for Novel Entities | Environmental Science & Technology](#)

² [5 key drivers of the nature crisis](#)

³ [Pesticides and health - POST \(parliament.uk\)](#)

⁴ [Toxic chemical cocktails found at over 1,600 river and groundwater sites across England \(wcl.org.uk\)](#)

⁵ [Chemical-Pollution-The-Silent-Killer-of-UK-Rivers-2022.pdf \(wildfish.org\)](#) <https://www.bgs.ac.uk/geology-projects/emerging-contaminants-in-groundwater/#:~:text=The types of emerging contaminants, industrial additives and byproducts> and [Emerging contaminants in groundwater - British Geological Survey \(bgs.ac.uk\)](#)

⁶ [Background Briefing Flame retardants 21.9.17 IS_nw.pdf \(breastcanceruk.org.uk\)](#)

⁷ [Anthropogenic Drivers of Variation in Concentrations of Perfluoroalkyl Substances in Otters \(Lutra lutra\) from England and Wales | Environmental Science & Technology \(acs.org\)](#) and [PBMS Gannet PFCs report 2013.pdf \(ceh.ac.uk\)](#) and [WATERSHED Investigations - in-depth coverage of the water crisis](#)

⁸ [Artboard 1 copy 2 \(chemtrust.org\)](#)

⁹ [Pharmaceuticals-in-freshwater-environments-and-their-potential-effects-on-freshwater-invertebrates-1.1.pdf \(buglife.org.uk\)](#)

¹⁰ [Policy Brief: From Feedstocks to Feedback Loops: Linking Chemicals and Climate Change | SDG Knowledge Hub | IISD](#) and mercuryconvention.org - mercuryconvention Resources and Information.

use of harmful chemicals undermines the viability and safety of a circular economy by contaminating secondary materials and rendering products unrecyclable.

Chemical pollution is speeding up nature loss and has a harmful impact on human health, meaning we must act quickly to bring in tougher controls and transition to safer alternatives.

Nature 2030 is a challenge to all political parties to take action, proposing five ambitious policies to help meet the legal target to halt the decline in species abundance by 2030.¹¹ For chemicals, this means:

- **A Pay Rise For Nature:** Ensuring that agricultural regulations and the Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS) sufficiently incentivise farmers to avoid over application of fertilisers and phase out harmful pesticide applications in favour of nature-friendly alternatives.
- **A Nature Recovery Obligation:** Establishing duties on large companies to reduce harm from toxic chemical pollution at the source.
- **A 30 by 30 Rapid Delivery Project:** More funding for protected sites means more financial support for sustainable land management that will enhance biodiversity, and reduce chemical inputs
- **A National Nature Service:** A NNS will support a workforce that provides for an effective chemicals monitoring and alert system and restore habitats contaminated by toxic chemicals.
- **A Right to a Healthy Environment:** Putting nature and wellbeing at the heart of environmental decision-making by introducing a legal right to healthy green and blue spaces, uncontaminated by harmful chemical pollution.

The next Parliament has an opportunity to position itself as a world leader on chemicals regulation to help deliver the 2030 nature target, and unlock wider environmental and health benefits. By tackling chemical pollution through Nature 2030 policies, the UK can work to remove hazardous chemicals from consumer products before they enter the environment, build a safe low-carbon circular economy and support nature's recovery in the rural environment. The fate of wildlife, ecosystems and human health is at stake.

¹¹ [Nature 2030 Campaign](#)

The five Nature 2030 policy asks are directed at the UK Government.

The UK government can increase the level of public funding nature receives and make decisions on chemicals regulation across the four nations of the UK.

For environmental policy asks that go beyond funding increases or chemical regulation changes (Nature Recovery Obligation, 30x30, National Nature Service, Environmental Rights Bill), the UK Government will need to secure the agreement of the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Governments before the introduction of those policies into their respective nations. We encourage the UK Government to urgently implement these proposals in England, where they control environmental policy, and to work closely with the devolved Governments to agree delivery of these objectives in other nations of the UK.

A Pay Rise for Nature

The policy in brief

Double the annual budget for nature-friendly farming and land management to at least £6 billion a year. In England, this should fund a major increase in ambition in the Farming Transition, including stronger incentives for ambitious agroecological actions on farms and a consistent budget for large-scale nature recovery projects.

Supporting action on chemicals

To improve the state of nature, we need an ambitious transformation of the way we farm and manage the land, reducing dependence on harmful chemicals. Between 2016 and 2020 there has been an increased use of glyphosate, other hazardous pesticides (including insecticides) that are lethal to bees and other pollinators, as well as human carcinogens, developmental toxins and endocrine disruptors.¹²

Rural diffuse pollution pathways such as surface run-off and soil erosion are sources of chemicals pollution in waterbodies and the wider environment.¹³ An average of 40% of nitrogen applied to land for crop production, or stored in farms, in the UK is not taken up by plants and therefore leaks into the environment, contributing to diffuse pollution and ammonia and nitrous oxide (a potent GHG) emissions.¹⁴

¹² [Pesticide Use in the UK - a snapshot of changes since 2016 by PAN UK - Issuu](#)

¹³ [CRW2018 18 Pathways report FINAL.pdf \(crew.ac.uk\)](#)

¹⁴ [Nature Natters - Getting to the root of the problem - cpm magazine \(cpm-magazine.co.uk\)](#)

Pesticides, excess nutrients from synthetic and organic fertilisers such as treated sewage sludge (biosolids), manure and slurry are particularly problematic as they have detrimental impacts on ecosystems and species.¹⁵¹⁶ Over 87% of biosolids produced by water companies in the UK are applied to agricultural land,¹⁷ which can cause illness in humans¹⁸ and contaminate the soil and watercourses with PFAS, bisphenols, flame retardants and many other emerging chemicals of concern that are not regulated.¹⁹ Ensuring biosolids are clean and safe and avoiding the contamination of agricultural land is a ‘nature-positive’ measure for soil health, the production of high-quality uncontaminated food and the circular economy.²⁰

An over-reliance on environmentally harmful approaches like the excess use of fertiliser and chemical pesticides is also a business liability. Rising costs of fertiliser and fuel from overseas gas alongside declining soil fertility and the loss of pollinators make this method of intensive farming management a poor business choice.²¹ With the right support, farmers can transition to food production techniques (such as agroecology) that contribute to nature recovery, enhance biodiversity and increased yields and economic profitability,²²²³ all whilst decreasing farmers’ reliance on toxic chemicals like pesticides and fertilisers produced from fossil fuels.²⁴²⁵

A Pay Rise for Nature would give farmers and land managers the financial support, standards and advice that are required to transition away from reliance on harmful chemicals use in farming.

Recent agricultural polling by Farmers Weekly shows that reducing pollution, particularly air and water contamination is the top issue that farmers would like to take-up funding for through the ELM scheme – with appetite from more than two-thirds of farmers. Yet it is also the area where farmers report the least work being funded,²⁶ with only 3% of respondents receiving payment for clean air measures and 6% being rewarded for pollution prevention or mitigation, including pollution arising from chemical use.

¹⁵ UK Progress on Reducing Nitrate Pollution, [Nitrates \(parliament.uk\)](https://www.parliament.uk/nitrates)

¹⁶ [Nitrogen Grasping the Challenge 1.9 \(summary version\).pdf \(ceh.ac.uk\)](https://www.ceh.ac.uk/nitrogen-grasping-the-challenge-1.9)

¹⁷ [About Biosolids : Assured biosolids](https://www.gov.uk/about-biosolids)

¹⁸ <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2002/07/020730075144.htm>

¹⁹ [European Environment Agency, 2021, Sewage Sludge and the Circular Economy](https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/press-communications/2021/07/0720210707)

²⁰ [Sewage Free Soils - Guidance for Farmers and Land Managers - Fidora](https://www.fidra.co.uk/sewage-free-soils)

²¹ [nfu-the-foundation-of-food.pdf \(nfuonline.com\)](https://www.nfuonline.com/nfu-the-foundation-of-food.pdf); [Why-Nature-is-Good-for-Business.pdf \(nffn.org.uk\)](https://www.nffn.org.uk/why-nature-is-good-for-business.pdf)

²² [The Economics of a Transition to Agroecological Farm Businesses \(soilassociation.org\)](https://www.soilassociation.org/the-economics-of-a-transition-to-agroecological-farm-businesses)

²³ [British survey of fertiliser practice 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/british-survey-of-fertiliser-practice-2022)

²⁴ [wildlifetrusts.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/Farming at the Sweet Spot 1.pdf](https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/Farming%20at%20the%20Sweet%20Spot%201.pdf)

²⁵ [Pesticides and the climate crisis - Pesticide Action Network UK \(pan-uk.org\)](https://www.pan-uk.org/pesticides-and-the-climate-crisis)

²⁶ [Transition survey reveals depth of concern over policy and costs - Farmers Weekly \(fwi.co.uk\)](https://www.fwi.co.uk/news/transition-survey-reveals-depth-of-concern-over-policy-and-costs)

Increasing the nature-friendly farming budget under the Environmental Land Management schemes (ELMs) will incentivise farmers and land managers to adopt new, high standards which phase out harmful pesticides, synthetic fertilisers, and veterinary medicines (e.g., wormers that significantly harm soil invertebrates²⁷). These high standards will reward wildlife-friendly, non-chemical alternatives such as organic farming, Integrated Pest Management and widening buffer strips protecting hedgerows.

Budget increases would also reward farmers for adopting agroecological, non-intensive farming solutions to restore soil health and to grow nutritious, sustainable food without the reliance and application of harmful chemicals. Appropriate incentives may help farmers to reduce average fertiliser nitrogen use by 40% on wheat crops without a yield penalty,²⁸ particularly given that crop yields have largely risen despite declining use of synthetic fertilisers in 2022.²⁹

Further chemicals regulation benefits from the Pay Rise for Nature include:

- **Extension of regulator mandate and budgets:** Enabling regulators such as the Environment Agency to monitor use of, and develop better data on, harmful pesticides and contaminated fertiliser products such as biosolids (sewage sludge). The Health and Safety Executive also requires significant additional resources to protect the public and environment from pesticide harm. With additional funding and resources, regulators will be able to use the precautionary principle to enforce regulations designed to prevent chemical pollution from agriculture and prevent repeat offences resulting from non-compliance and lack of political pressure for an effective, well-funded enforcement regime.³⁰
- **More advice available for farmers:** Farmers generally want farming methods that increase food production and profit in a nature-friendly way but struggle to access free, expert advice. The uplift in funding will pay for advisory support on the menu of options available to farmers and provide resources for transitioning away from harmful chemical reliance to regenerative and agroecological practices, including organic farming and agroforestry.

²⁷ [Implications of Endectocide Residues on the Survival of Aphodiine Dung Beetles: A Meta-Analysis - Finch - 2020 - Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry - Wiley Online Library](#)

²⁸ [protecting_our_assets.pdf \(green-alliance.org.uk\)](#)

²⁹ [British survey of fertiliser practice 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

³⁰ [Post-EU-exit-Regulatory-Framework-Final-Jan-2020.pdf \(ieep.eu\)](#), p. 11

A Nature Recovery Obligation

The policy in brief

Major economic sectors, including infrastructure, development, consumer goods and water all contribute to the decline of nature.

These sectors should be subject to a Nature Recovery Obligation. This regulatory requirement should require private sector funding for nature recovery, sharing out the effort required to meet key Environment Act and Climate Change Act targets. This should include:

1. Mandatory corporate disclosure of value-chain impacts and dependencies on nature, including supply, investments, customer use and direct operations.
2. A duty to publish 1.5C-aligned climate and nature recovery transition plans
3. Regulatory requirements for companies to fund nature's recovery, based on a sector's impact on nature.

Supporting action on chemicals

Chemical pollution from industrial processes is contributing to biodiversity losses in freshwater and marine ecosystem wildlife in the UK.³¹ Only 14% of rivers in England meet good ecological status and none meet good chemical status,³² and there is mounting evidence of widespread risks to wildlife and human health.³³

Although the regulation of harmful chemicals that are still in use (in line with the precautionary principle) remains the first-line of action, businesses have a supporting role in protecting nature from hazardous chemicals, such as a responsibility to minimise impact on nature through the transition to alternative, safer products and responsible disposal.

A Nature Recovery Obligation offers an opportunity to tackle chemical pollution from business and its negative impact for nature and public health.

Firstly, it would require companies to assess their environmental impact and produce nature recovery and climate plans, meaning polluters would be required to lay out how they would change their business practices to stop adding to harmful chemical pollution. Secondly polluters would also be made to pay through a levy that assesses their environmental

³¹ [Chemical-pollution-impact-UK CHEM-Trust MCS May2021-1.pdf \(chemtrust.org\)](#)

³² ['Chemical cocktail' of sewage, slurry and plastic polluting English rivers puts public health and nature at risk - Committees - UK Parliament/](#)

³³ [Global danger: Threatened and endangered species at risk from PFAS exposure \(ewg.org\) Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substance Toxicity and Human Health Review: Current State of Knowledge and Strategies for Informing Future Research \(wiley.com\)](#)

impact, meaning those that pollute have to pay a fair amount to tackle the problems they are causing.

An ambitious UK Chemicals Strategy to inform nature recovery plans:

The Government must set a robust policy framework, to underpin and inform actions by businesses to reduce chemical pollution.

To support nature's recovery, a UK Chemicals Strategy must phase out and ban the most hazardous chemicals from consumer products for all non-essential uses by 2030 and ensure³⁴ phase out of the use of PFAS and other very persistent chemicals.³⁵ Given that chemical cocktails have been found in over 1,600 river, lake and groundwater sites across England,³⁶ it is also imperative to address the significant harms resulting from combined exposure to mixtures of chemicals through this cocktail effect, via the introduction of a Mixture Assessment Factor, a safety test to assess possible interactions before chemicals are allowed to be put on the market.

Delays and lack of ambition on chemical regulation since leaving the EU is creating a divergence, with the UK's chemical protections looking increasingly weaker comparatively. The UK should align with EU REACH and related chemical laws, widely regarded as the international gold standard for chemical protections³⁷, as they continue to improve. With a robust UK Chemicals Strategy and other regulation (such as pesticides, veterinary medications and pharmaceuticals) in place as a strong regulatory baseline and policy guide, the Nature Recovery Obligation could require large companies to set out how, and when, they will phase out groups of the most harmful chemicals and transition to products that are safe by design.

Nature recovery plans will also support better monitoring of chemical pollutants in the environment through mandatory corporate disclosure obligations on harmful chemicals used throughout corporate value chains.

³⁴ [End Chemical Pollution Briefing- July 2022-CLEAN \(chemtrust.org\)](https://www.chemtrust.org/2022/07/end-chemical-pollution-briefing-july-2022-clean/)

³⁵ [A UK Chemicals Strategy That's Fit for Purpose- Defra briefing September 2022 \(chemtrust.org\)](https://www.chemtrust.org/2022/09/a-uk-chemicals-strategy-thats-fit-for-purpose-defra-briefing-september-2022/)

³⁶ [Chemical Cocktail Campaign | The Rivers Trust](https://www.chemtrust.org/2022/05/chemical-cocktail-campaign-the-rivers-trust/)

³⁷ [Regulatory gap between UK and EU at risk of becoming a chasm \(chemtrust.org\)](https://www.chemtrust.org/2022/05/regulatory-gap-between-uk-and-eu-at-risk-of-becoming-a-chasm/)

A levy to make polluters pay:

It is fundamental that we regulate hazardous chemicals and stop chemical pollution before it ever occurs (banning harmful substances at the source). Banning harmful chemicals in consumer and professional products before they pollute the environment and accumulate in our bodies is estimated to bring ten times more health benefits than industry costs resulting from the ban. It also mitigates the long-term economic costs associated with irreversible chemical pollution.³⁸³⁹ But while we work towards this transition, the Nature Recovery Obligation would establish regulations that require polluters to pay a levy to remedy the problems they cause.

Companies that produce polluting products, waste and byproducts, would be required to help fund nature recovery. This would comprise direct mitigation, where pollution events and the harm they cause can be directly identified,⁴⁰ but could also function similarly to a carbon levy on the amount of chemical pollutants incorporated in products and waste.

Such a levy would incentivise the chemicals industry and downstream suppliers to become “nature positive”, switching to safer alternatives that are not penalised by the levy. Where no safe alternative exists, the larger levy payments will strategically incentivise businesses to innovate suitable alternatives. Larger chemicals producers would be subject to the highest levies to compensate for immediate harm, whereas downstream businesses may be supported by certified schemes and standards for their supply chains.

³⁸ [SWD IA REACH revision Redacted.pdf \(corporateeurope.org\)](#)

³⁹ [Late lessons from early warnings: science, precaution, innovation — European Environment Agency \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁴⁰ [A poisonous legacy: PCBs and the killer whale apocalypse \(endsreport.com\)](#)

A 30 by 30 Rapid Delivery Project

The policy in brief

The next Government should prioritise a new “30 by 30 Rapid Delivery Project” to fulfil its commitment under the Global Biodiversity Framework to protect 30% of the land and sea for nature by 2030 and to secure an environmental legacy for the future. The project would consist of four pillars:

1. **Completing and improving the protected site network:** Designating the most important, unprotected sites for endangered species as SSSIs and establishing new incentives and obligations for landowners to manage vital nature sites (SSSIs and other protected sites) in the public interest, so England’s most important nature sites are thriving by 2030.
2. **Landscapes for the future:** Updated purposes, powers and funding for protected landscapes (National Parks and AONBs) to do more for nature on protected sites, will enable some of England’s most loved landscapes to become beacons of biodiversity restoration. As the example of Windemere lake shows, nutrient pollution, species decline and poor water quality are all consequences agricultural, sewage and chemical pollution in protected landscapes.⁴¹
3. **A Public Nature Estate Obligation:** New duties and purposes for public bodies (such as the Forestry Commission and Government Departments like the MoD) to recover nature, including transparently developing research, data and monitoring systems on hazardous chemical pollution^{42,43} and address its sources, care for the land they own and manage it for biodiversity recovery and climate change mitigation.
4. **An expanded Public Nature Estate:** An expansion of public and community land ownership, where such purchases, followed by sustained management for nature, would enable communities to protect cherished natural spaces from contamination and improve ecological conditions, enabling greater public access.

⁴¹ [Windemere: an iconic lake in trouble? | Cumbria Wildlife Trust](#)

⁴² [Policy options to account for multiple chemical pollutants threatening biodiversity - Environmental Science: Advances \(RSC Publishing\)](#)

⁴³ [Better integration of chemical pollution research will further our understanding of biodiversity loss | Nature Ecology & Evolution](#)

Supporting action on chemicals

The 30 by 30 Rapid Delivery Project will drive a suite of ambitious actions that protect and improve the condition of land, freshwater and marine sites that are contaminated by toxic chemicals.

The project would complement regulation of the chemicals lifecycle and better integrate policy action on chemicals pollution with biodiversity protection. More funding for SSSI management and in protected landscapes means more financial support for restoring land habitats suffering from chemical pollution.

We need to prevent chemical pollution before it happens. New incentives and obligations for landowners to manage SSSIs and other protected sites in the public interest will help achieve this, supporting the mitigation of chemical pollution from production, usage and disposal. The expansion of protected site status could restore ecological sites to favourable status, particularly in national parks and SSSIs where chemical pollution, such as high uses of veterinary pesticides⁴⁴, has significantly impacted soils and wildlife.

Updating the purposes, powers and funding for the management of protected landscapes will also minimise the impact of hazardous chemicals on nature by helping land managers to restore biodiversity in contaminated sites and ecosystems. Increased financial support for nature-based solutions in nature restoration (e.g., wetlands operating as a natural pollution filtration system for nitrate run off from synthetic fertilisers⁴⁵) will jointly address recovery and pollution reduction.

One option in the menu of new duties and purposes for public bodies includes stronger requirements for Government deliver and harmonise monitoring programmes for chemicals in land, freshwater and marine environments. An expansion of public and community land ownership, complemented by land management plans for nature, will enable land owners to better protect nature on their land by giving them greater power to challenge the sources of chemical pollution.

⁴⁴ [Livestock Management in Red-Billed Cough Feeding Habitat in Great Britain and the Isle of Man - ScienceDirect](#) and [Cough Birds | The Comeback - The RSPB](#)

⁴⁵ There are instances of wetland plants filtering PFAS: [Juncus sarophorus, a native Australian species, tolerates and accumulates PFOS, PFOA and PFHxS in a glasshouse experiment - ScienceDirect](#)

A National Nature Service

The policy in brief

A National Nature Service should be established to deliver practical expertise and hands-on training in green skills and qualifications for thousands of people. It would combine on-the-job skills training with a programme of capital investment in habitat restoration around the country.

The NNS would fill the green skills gap,⁴⁶ create and support thousands of employment opportunities and provide a skilled workforce to deliver nature restoration at the scale and pace needed to halt the decline of wildlife by 2030.

Supporting action on chemicals

Chemical pollution reaches our environment from multiple sources. In addition to action to stem chemical pollutants at the source, we can restore our natural pollution defences and filters. Enhancing the nature-based solutions known to help limit chemical pollution is crucial to create a better state of nature for wildlife and people.

Establishing a large-scale programme of capital investment in green innovation and habitat restoration, delivered through the National Nature Service will give citizens the skills to repair and protect ecosystems, helping address damages caused by chemical pollution.

The National Nature Service will generate a new wave of workers that will have the expertise to restore degraded ecosystems. Thousands of people will be upskilled to enter green sectors, such as regenerative farming and sustainable forestry that do not rely on the use of toxic chemicals, or sectors that produce safer, greener consumer alternatives.

Across the sectors that focus on nature restoration, training programmes will invest people with knowledge on how to improve habitats and biodiversity and deliver benefits for environmental and human health. These placements may be delivered by eNGOs, charity and business providers.

Currently, UK policy does not create an appropriate framework for incentivising nature-based solutions as a means of reducing toxic chemical dependency across land uses.⁴⁷ A National Nature Service can support the delivery and implementation of nature-based solutions that would help tackle chemical pollution. With appropriate knowledge and training, people will develop the understanding of delivering effective policy and practices for establishing wildflower borders around fields and hedgerow management for reducing pesticide run-off, managing soil and creating habitats for wetland filtration. These can have

⁴⁶ [Closing the UKs green skills gap.pdf \(green-alliance.org.uk\)](https://www.green-alliance.org.uk/Closing-the-UKs-green-skills-gap.pdf)

⁴⁷ [End Chemical Pollution Briefing- July 2022-CLEAN \(chemtrust.org\)](https://www.chemtrust.org/End-Chemical-Pollution-Briefing-July-2022-CLEAN)

notable impacts for chemical and other pollutants, with wetlands able to remove up to 60% of metals, trap and retain up to 90% of sediment runoff and eliminate up to 90% of nitrogen.⁴⁸

A Right to a Healthy Environment

The policy in brief

The loss of green space and the pollution of the air and water threatens everyone's health. It is cutting lives short, especially in the most economically disadvantaged communities.

A new Environmental Rights Bill would create a human right to a clean and healthy environment for all. Combined with greater investment in environmental improvement, it would address deepening health inequalities and empower people to hold public bodies to account on pollution, climate change and the nature crisis.

Supporting action on chemicals

Environmental chemical pollution impedes access to nature and has a direct impact on human health and wellbeing.

Some of the most harmful chemicals do not break down in the environment, with catastrophic consequences. The cocktail of chemicals and microplastics contaminating wastes such as composts, digestates and biosolids used for crop production, as well as agrochemicals/pesticides used to protect crops,⁴⁹⁵⁰ result in persistent chemicals (such as PFAS, the forever chemicals) contaminating UK soil, watercourses and marine ecosystems.⁵¹⁵²⁵³ Disadvantaged communities already lack equitable access to green and blue spaces⁵⁴⁵⁵ and are disproportionately exposed to chemicals pollution due to close proximity to polluted or contaminated sites.⁵⁶

⁴⁸ [Pollution and wetlands | WWT](#)

⁴⁹ [agricultural-and-rural-land-management-challenge-rbmp-2021.pdf \(environment-agency.gov.uk\)](#)

⁵⁰ [circularonline.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/EN-ReportDigestateandcompostasfertilisers-Feb-2019.pdf](#)

⁵¹ EAC. (2022). 'Water Quality in Rivers' [Water Quality in Rivers \(parliament.uk\)](#)

⁵² [Chemical-pollution-impact-UK CHEM-Trust MCS May2021-1.pdf \(chemtrust.org\)](#)

⁵³ [Secret report details toxic chemicals in sewage used as fertiliser at English farms - Unearthed \(greenpeace.org\)](#)

⁵⁴ [Improving access to greenspace: 2020 review \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

⁵⁵ [Out-of-Bounds-equity-in-access-to-urban-nature.pdf \(groundwork.org.uk\)](#)

⁵⁶ [UK waste incinerators disproportionately sited in most deprived areas - Unearthed \(greenpeace.org\)](#)

People come into contact with cocktails of these chemicals through the air, water, food or skin contact (e.g., consumer products). The accumulated exposure to chemicals may contribute to significant health problems, including endocrine disruption and various cancers.⁵⁷⁵⁸ Together, these issues create a perfect storm of socio-economic environmental injustice and health disparities.

An Environmental Rights Bill would require authorities to take action on chemical pollution occurring on land and in freshwater and marine sites they are responsible for.

The legislation would require the Government and service providers make decisions that are compatible with the right to a healthy environment and other environmental rights, such as the phase out of hazardous chemicals from consumer products and environmental use. Public bodies would have the duty to protect communities from the build-up of hazardous chemicals and chemical cocktails in nature and account for this responsibility in environmental decision-making on addressing soil and freshwater pollution, managing marine plastic chemical pollution and appropriate agricultural management.

Recognising a Right to a Healthy Environment will bring further benefits to chemicals regulation:

- **Empowering local people and communities to hold the government and polluters to account for violations.** The Environmental Rights Bill would give people more ability to take legal action against environmental decisions that contribute to chemicals pollution. The Bill would ensure that this action could be taken without risk of significant personal costs, through a cap on legal costs in such environmental cases.
- **Green and blue social prescribing⁵⁹ to boost preventative healthcare:** Nature-based interventions and activities that require a healthy environment, such as community gardening projects and open water swimming, can improve physical and mental health, acting as preventative healthcare, reducing demand for NHS services and medicines . Enabling greater access to a healthy environment, through a fund connected to the Environmental Rights Bill, would become a win-win solution for both human health and wildlife.

⁵⁷ [Endocrine Disruptors: from Scientific Evidence to Human Health Protection \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁵⁸ [Pesticides and Human Health \(pesticidecollaboration.org\)](#)

⁵⁹ [NHS England » Green social prescribing](#)

Connecting the dots: A strong approach to halting chemicals pollution

People and nature in the UK need ambitious and holistic action to protect them from toxic chemicals pollution. The Nature 2030 policy programme would deliver this.

The full potential of these Nature 2030 actions could be unlocked by further policy measures to address chemical pollution, including a duty for the Government to consult on significant reforms to the UK REACH system and ensure alignment with EU REACH and related chemicals laws.⁶⁰ The Government should also establish a duty to reduce pesticide related harms by introducing pesticide reduction targets⁶¹ and concrete implementation measures in its revised National Action Plan on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides.

A comprehensive, long-term and outcome-based target for chemicals regulation, and in particular the UK Chemicals Strategy, would also drive action and accountability. This target must be guided by the best use of science, ensure a phase out all non-essential uses of hazardous chemicals and build upon recommendations for grouping of chemicals to avoid regrettable substitution.

Safeguarding nature and people from hazardous chemicals by 2030

We cannot achieve a better state of nature without protecting nature from chemicals pollution and restoring contaminated ecosystems.

If implemented, Nature 2030 policies will help create a toxic-free future: full of flourishing food systems, natural landscapes, countryside and cities that can be safely enjoyed by people from all walks of life. By carefully controlling what chemicals are produced and used, protecting nature from contamination, and ensuring people have access to their rightful healthy environments, we can create a better, safer future for both wildlife and humans.

⁶⁰[Regulatory gap between UK and EU at risk of becoming a chasm \(chemtrust.org\)](https://chemtrust.org/)

⁶¹[Reduction targets report Jan2023.pdf \(pesticidecollaboration.org\)](https://pesticidecollaboration.org/)



NATURE 2030

The Chemicals Manifesto has been published as part of the [Nature 2030](#) campaign, supported by over 90 environmental, climate and health organisations. You can support the Nature 2030 campaign [here](#).

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